虛構推理
Invented Inference
○綱人十瀬○
城平京
Kyo Shirodaira

Kyokou Suiri - Chapter 01-03 (Incomplete)

Table of Contents

1. One Eyed And One Legged
2. Rumor About Steel Ghost
3. Idol Who Dies by Steel Beam

One Eyed And One Legged

It is said that a sleeping child is a growing child, and good things come to those who wait. But, no one knows to what extent they would still be true.

Iwanaga Kotoko is a young girl who likes to take a nap outside while listening to the sound of rain.

According to her parents, when she was still a baby, she never cries at night whenever it is raining, only swinging her body happily.

If she was only going to be napping inside the house it would not be much of a problem. However, once she was old enough to understand things around her herself, she realized that it is most comforting when she sleeps outside where there is nothing to block the sound of the rain.

Whenever it rains, she would be sleeping on a bench with a roof in the park or napping at a bus stop. If the weather forecast marked the day with a rain sign, she would spend her time thinking of a nice place to sleep since early in the morning.

At the present, her lifestyle has not changed even though she is a 17-year-old high school girl now, and her friends at school always said this to her while laughing “You’re a girl so you should be more careful although it sounds very much like things you would do” and they eventually got bored with saying it every time.

And the people who know her since elementary school often said while showing some hesitation “It was because you’re like that such accident..”.

The fact that even after something had occurred, her behavior or personality have not changed at all, is scaring some people.

After all, that were said, she did take them into her mind
and refrain herself from sleeping at a place where almost nobody passes but she still does not feel anything dangerous about it.

“A sleeping child is a growing child, and good things come to those who wait. Isn’t people always said that?”

She always answers such every time and continues to sleep outside whenever it is raining.

But in her case, even if she had said so, her words did not have the needed persuading power which kind of troubles her.

Even today Iwanaga Kotoko was taking a nap. May 17th, Saturday, passed 4 o’clock in the evening, on a wooden bench at the terrace of H University Hospital’s rear garden which she came by taking a bus after finishing her shopping at the city.

It started raining today around noon, making a *shito-shito* sound as it continued to pouring down without anything to disturb the quietness. And she thought it as a bliss so she came earlier than the appointed time, about one hour early and took a nap there.

There was no sound of the siren of ambulance making a delivery to the hospital nor the voices of the hospital’s visitors or the sound of their footsteps while she closed her eyes and dozed off inside that quiet terrace.

She felt a feeling of something had pulled the lace-decorated hem of her knee-length one-piece from below so she opened her eyelids.

“Hmm, ah, is it time already?”

Looking at the watch with her sleepy eyes, it was 10 minutes before the appointed time.

Around her feet was something that looks like an irregular figure around the size of a puppy, and it seemed like it bowed to her right before it ran away in the direction of the green garden and vanished.

“Yeah, thanks.”

Iwanaga said to that direction and stretched once before putting on a cream-colored beret on her lap while still be seated. Then, she buttoned her cardigans and reached for her red cane before

standing up.

It was not like she needs the cane to walk around, she can even run over a 50 m distance in 9 seconds but her parents seemed to be worried if she did not do that so she is walking with something that is very unusual for a high-school girl.

However, its handle was specially made; resembling a cute looking curling small cat as she had requested.

At first, she had thought of having a skull decorated one like one that an evil ruler would have but she does not want people to think badly of her. She still has the common sense within her.

The hospital that she is commuting once a week since she was 11, is located in the suburb and has the department of surgery, internal medicine, pediatrics, ophthalmology, otorhinolaryngology, urology, maternity, and gynecology- anyway, it has almost all the departments and providing most of the medical needs of that region.

Within its ground are lots of greens, and at the entrance, there are rows of Yoshino Cherry trees that were blooming with pinkish white color up till not so long ago and also a few rows of fan palm tree.

Its rear garden is decorated with Flowering Dogwood and Azalea which covered pretty much of the area.

Inside the building, there are a convenience store, hair salon, cafe, and restaurant, and recently they had opened a bookstore too.

In this city at the heart of a prefecture with no specialty that could be sold nationwide, it can be said it has the best facility and environment among other medical care facilities and make one feels at ease to enter or go back and forth.

A good friend of Iwanaga's father is working there and she also needs to take multiple medical checkups across many departments so a place where everything can be done is better, hence, she has been commuting the hospital for the past seven years.

“Iwanaga-san, I was about to go and wake you up but it seems you are right on time, as always.”

As she walked casually to the examination room, a nurse whose face she often sees reached out for her.

“Even though I look like this, I have a very firm personality after all.”

“No matter how I look at you, it does not seem to be that way..”

Her habit of taking a nap on a rainy day is well-known among the nurses but she has never been late for her checkup.

With height no higher than 150 cm, she has a small body figure that weighs less than 40 kg.

On top of that, she is wearing a beret while walking around holding a cane with elegance, and she speaks as if nothing ever troubles her in her life.

Thus, Iwanaga only looks like a daughter from a rich family that knows nothing about the world, if anything, it is the opposite of the firm personality that she said herself.

And she is indeed a daughter of a rich family.

“Ah, and there is this too.”

The nurse put her face close to Iwanaga’s and spoke with a low voice.

“It seems like Kurou-kun really broke up with his girlfriend.”

Hearing those words, although Iwanaga already predicted it she was nevertheless shocked.

“But they were already at the stage where they promised to get married?”

“I don’t know the details, but yes it is true. His girlfriend is one year older than him, so she graduated first this spring. It seems that she

had found a job in another prefecture, maybe that's the reason?"

Breaking up before it becoming long-distance relationship is not something weird to hear, but it made Iwanaga titled her head.

Since the girlfriend is one year older, it is a given that she will graduate first, and they would have of course, already considered about it.

Unless one is unbelievably thoughtless, it is not something that would become a reason to break up after a month or two.

At this point, Iwanaga does not think that [Kurou-kun] nor his girlfriend are that kind of thoughtless person.

"Anyways, Kurou-kun is here visiting his cousin today too. If things went well, you might see him. So, do your best."

The nurse said as she smiled giving her some encouragement words. Then her face changed to somewhat sad as she said the following in a low voice.

"And also, that cousin of his, it seems she does not have much time left. She already had it tough for quite a while now, if you don't act quickly it'll be hard later on."

If the person he keeps visiting is no longer in this hospital, her chances to meet him would be gone. It would be a problem indeed.

Afterward, Iwanaga gave a small bow to the sight of the back of the nurse who is returning to her work and headed to the examination room through the damp corridor with her cane.

Now, even if she told me to do my best, what exactly should I do? First things first, I need to get closer to him.

Iwanaga adjusted her beret and walked to the examination room while spinning around her cane.

The first time Iwanaga met [Kurou-kun], a young man named Sakuragawa Kurou was 2 years ago when she was 15. Not long after her last summer vacation as a middle-schooler had started.

That day, Iwanaga was visiting the hospital too, she was hoping for an evening rain as she walked along the corridor after her checkup ended. The young man who was walking in the same direction in front of her somehow managed to fall splendidly backward towards her. It seemed like a kid suddenly appeared from the corner and he lost his balance as he tried to avoid colliding with that kid.

Even though it could not be helped that he lost his balance, she thought there is a lot other safer ways of losing balance other than that. She could not just stay quiet there and do nothing so she moved forth a few steps to stop and support the falling young man.

The young man has a slender figure but he is about 30 cm taller than Iwanaga. Although he looked weak his weight would still be close to double that of hers.

Even then, she had a 'third leg' which is her cane as the third point to support her stand. In addition, she had made it a habit to train her arms so her arms are stronger than a normal girl.

She hugged him with her right hand to stop him, gracefully succeeded to prevent a horrible accident of young man hitting the back of his head to the floor to death.

"Are you alright?"

"Ah, this is… Thank you."

The young man had braced himself for the fall but he was perplexed when someone had managed to hold and support him firmly from behind, and that 'someone' was just a young girl, or perhaps a little girl. On top of that, that girl was holding a cane.

As a man, his current position was somewhat nice and somewhat bad but it was not something that he could help. The young man immediately let himself go from Iwanaga's hand and fixed his stand.

"You saved me, ah, and sorry."

"Then, if you would remember me as someone who saved your life for the rest of your lifetime, it would be great."

“I don’t think it was that kind of big deal..”

But he stopped there and then said-

“I see, in some cases it would normally be a dangerous situation. I’ll remember it.”

as he looked downwards to her and laughed.

That was Sakuragawa Kurou, 20-year-old at that time.

Iwanaga, at that time, felt that the young man was similar to a mountain goat.

Maybe it would be more correct to say ‘she had seen through’ rather than ‘she felt’.

A small creature that always spaced out eating grass real slowly, and it might had spent its entire life spacing out but it strangely gives a feeling of living.

That is right, you must not make light of a goat as just an animal that eats grass.

They are nimble creatures, and they can live easily on higher ground or wild land.

And, some species of the mountain goats have a pair of strong horns. Like those of Oni’s horn.

And the young man was giving not a simple feeling of sharpness about himself.

Is this what people called love at first sight. Iwanaga came to a realization as she looked up to the young man whom she did not even know the name, and was about to ask him if he had anything planned afterward when a nuisance entered the scene.

“What are you doing, Kurou-kun. How embarrassing.”

It was a woman who is slightly taller than Kurou and seemed to be at the same age as him.

She was wearing fit trousers on those long and slender nice-looking legs, her motionless black straight hair was grown up till the bottom of her neck.

The woman was giving a feeling of a great vigor. It felt like even if she were right in a middle of a typhoon her feet, no, even her eyebrows would not move a bit.

“Saki-san. I was saved by this girl.”

“Yes, I saw that. It was because you were spacing out again, geez.”

The woman called Saki interrupted Kurou’s words making an angry-like expression and then looked at Iwanaga with an apologetic face and lowered her head.

“Sorry for troubling you, and thanks.”

Why are you the one apologizing, was what Iwanaga going to say when she was about to raise her hand to complain but the woman put her hand on Kurou’s head making him lower his head, and as if not giving Iwanaga any moment to speak, she casually put her hand around Kurou’s arm as if it was normal and pulled him away towards the corner and they were gone.

Iwanaga was considering the possibility of that woman being his older sister or his relative or possibly his younger sister, but when she thought about it normally, the woman seemed nothing else but his girlfriend.

Just when she had fallen in love on the first sight, an obstacle suddenly appeared blocking her from trying. *What a bad development of a story*, she thought.

She had never once mad or hate the vicissitude of fate her entire life but only that time, she was.

Later she tried asking about the young man to the nurses whom she had grown closer with after many years commuting the hospital and she found out some information that she did not expect.

His name is Sakuragawa Kurou and he is a second-year student at

the faculty of law of H University, the same university that manages this very university hospital.

He often visits his cousin who was admitted for a long time. And the woman who always with him is indeed his girlfriend, who is his one-year-above senpai.

The both of them have been dating since high school, and he entered the same university to chase after her.

“Although I feel bad for you Kotoko-chan, but Kurou-kun is impossible I think. You see, he is quite good-looking and he seems like a good person so some of the nurses tried to make a small talk with him but all he ever talks is about his girlfriend with a happy face.”

“That wasn’t a pleasant thing to see, isn’t it?”

That said, even if he really likes that woman called Saki, Saki does not necessarily likes him the way he does.

“Oh and also, that girlfriend of his too, whenever she saw Kurou-kun is talking happily with the nurse, she went and got herself between them with a smile on her face, and without ruining the mood she grabbed him away and went off somewhere else. At first, they didn’t come here together, I think she realized that some of the nurses were going after him, so now she often comes along with him.”

“Well, she does look like a strong-willed woman.”

“Maybe because she has a strong sense to monopoly
things to herself. If you think about it again, it feels like she also is quite in love with Kurou-kun.”

“So you mean I have no chance of winning?”

“Kurou-kun’s type is a girl like her so, I doubt he’ll even consider you as a love target.”

That woman called Saki is a woman with an adult charm, smart and tall. Although she looks slender but she looks like she exercises her

body often, plus her slim well-grown hair, she is indeed a beautiful woman.

On the other hand, Iwanaga also has a slender body but her figure looks like a little girl.

Her hair looks fluffy and mostly curly at the end, and look-wise she does not look like someone with a good brain.

Although she has a small hope for the future as she is still growing phase, but looking at her family she could not expect much.

“Well, anything could happen, so maybe it’s fine if you don’t want to give up right yet.”

That nurse said that but from the way she spoke, what she meant was quite obvious, the complete opposite of what she had said, telling her to take her time to give up as she slapped Iwanaga’s back.

And, sometimes the ‘things’ that often appear around her also-

“Princess, please give up on ‘that’. ‘That’ is different one. ‘That’ is very fearful one.”

had repeatedly warned her.

And so, two years had passed from their met.

Iwanaga often sees Kurou 2 or 3 times a month at the hospital and observes him but she never did go and talk to him (Saki was with him most of the times. Just when one thought she is not there, she will appear very soon after), but she occasionally heard about his current circumstances from the nurses.

About when the both of them graduated, they promised to get married, about that they already done meeting each other’s parents, and even about their engagement plan.

She could not escape from hearing such news and kept hearing them till the end of last year that she felt like throwing her beret hat to the wall and pouting in sadness.

And then, this April.

Kurou was alone all by himself at the hospital's lobby when she saw him.

Looking down at the floor and seemed extremely down. There were eye bags around his eyes too.

Later, she went around asking the nurses a few times, to ask them to confirm whether if he had broken up with her girlfriend or not but without making it too obvious.

"Now that you've said it, he didn't talk about her anymore since February I think. Wait, I think he didn't even talk to anyone here that often anymore."

So one of the nurses said while frowning her eyebrows.

And today Iwanaga had confirmed that her judgment was correct.

Although she could not say whether this means a chance for her or not.

But if she did not try to talk to him soon enough, the only one thing that would connect her with Kurou would be gone.

Given that Kurou is doing fine with his study, he should be able to graduate this year, and if he managed to find a job, that would put a limit on how many times he could come to the hospital later on.

And it would be even worse if he had to move away from the city or even the prefecture, just like the nurse had warned her before, he would not be able to come for a visit to the hospital anymore.

The truth is, she had heard that cousin of that person had repeatedly attempted to kill herself, and twice a month she is brought to the emergency room to be revived, and also about her being a key person in some sort of factional dispute which made Iwanaga wants to say "what the hell is that". She had heard a lot of such rumors.

As for Iwanaga, she does not know whether the rumors were true or

not.

And it would not be strange if one day, such person suddenly died from something unexpected.

Since the nurse had gone out to tell her to act quickly, so the situation must be pretty bad, she thought.

Then, this is a chance that she must not let escaped. After the check-up just to see whether her condition is the same as always had ended without a hitch, she thought of the place where Kurou probably be in the hospital.

The rain was still pouring when her check-up ended, and she would probably be sleeping on the bench outside till the time for the bus to arrive before going home like she always does but today she can not afford to do that.

She found Kurou without much effort. He had just sat on the very same bench where Iwanaga had about half an hour ago, watching the flowering dogwood that still blooming after the sakura season being hit by the rain with his leg crossed and a paper cup in his hand that he brought close to his mouth.

Within these 2 years, he did not get taller, or gain more muscle nor more weight like Iwanaga expected him to be.

Although he did not seem to have a mature look as an adult, his appearance did not change much since the first time she met him.

With hair just at the length enough to cover his ears, he looks like a tall guy that will try his best not to get in the way of other people.

Today he was wearing a deep blue jeans and white T-shirt plus a thin jacket with wilting grass color, without any decoration on his body. Just a plain-looking guy. And he does not look like a forceful person.

However, if one look at him closely, his face is not bad at all, and everything that he wears suits him quite nicely because of his balanced hand and leg proportion.

In school, class or workplace, this type of man is not the most popular type but looking at the reality, it is the most reasonable type to date. And it is rumored among the girls, dating such man is considered as hitting a jackpot, probably.

Saki had been holding him close since high-school. Although it is frustrating, Iwanaga had to admit that she has an eye for man. But now that they had broken up, she will have him instead.

Iwanaga, while trying to make less footstep and cane noises as possible, approached the bench.

“Hello, it’s been a while.”

She spoke to him from the side. Kurou turned his head and looked up towards the girl, he did not seem to be surprised at her appearance, instead, he was showing a puzzled expression.

“Uhm–m, who are you?”

“It looks like you have forgotten the face of the one who saved your life.”

“Unfortunately, I don’t think I’ve ever been in a life-threatening situation for the past 10 years.”

“About 2 years ago, at this very hospital.”

Kurou knitted his eyebrows, trying to bring out the memories.

“Ah, that girl told me if I might have died if I fell on the back of my head, but that girl wasn’t wearing a beret hat at that time.”

“Are you remembering girls by their hat?”

Forget the face, he did not even remember the most standing out point; a girl with a cane. It made Iwanaga questioned his memory.

Even though he said he will remember it, this is why men can not be trusted.

Kurou who could not make a good excuse to save his face lifted his

hip a little and moved a bit to the left from where he was sitting.

“Sorry, I’m not good at remembering girls’ faces. When I did remember them, it put Saki-san in a bad mood.”

That woman’s desire to hog him for herself was really strong after all. Iwanaga felt annoyed hearing that name so she took off her hat as she sat next to Kurou and looked up at Kurou while still gripping her cane with her left hand.

“Well then, once again, please remember this. My name is Iwanaga Kotoko. It is spelled with “Gan” from “Ganseki” (rock) and”Ei” from “Eien” (eternity), “Koto” like the musical instrument and “Ko” of “Kodomo” (child). I’m seventeen-year-old right now. I’m a lively type of person.”

“Un, I won’t forget it this time.”

“You’d better do, since I heard you have already broken up with Saki-san.”

Kurou’s hand that was about to bring the paper cup to his mouth stopped mid-air.

“How did you?”

“I have been frequenting this hospital for close to 7 years now, and I am on good terms with the nurses, I’m doing them favors sometimes. So, I am able to get information out of them. Information like; your name is Sakuragawa Kurou, 22-year-old this year and you’ve been visiting your cousin in this hospital for more than 3 years now.”

“I wonder what happened to the protection of people’s personal information in this hospital.”

“They said their duty to protect it doesn’t extend to visitors, however.”

“Is that how it is?”

“It does sound suspicious right? But of course, they didn’t tell me

your cousin's name, which department and what block, or what reason she's admitted for."

She has an interest in knowing, but there are things people do not want others to know, and there are things that others should not pry into.

Kurou gazed off into the distance.

"It's better if you don't know. Reasons for long-term hospitalization is not a very interesting thing to hear."

Iwanaga too thinks that the reason why she is commuting the hospital is not something interesting either. But, if they asked, she'd tell them what they want to hear.

"Speaking of which, I heard that cousin of yours won't last any much longer."

"Well, the person herself doesn't seem to be wanting to live anymore."

No matter what she said, this kind of topic probably would not get any livelier.

In the first place, it is not about his cousin that Iwanaga wants to talk about.

"So, about the story of you and Saki-san breaking up early this spring."

"My personal information isn't being protected at all, isn't it."

"That was because you were thoughtlessly responded to those young nurses when they asked you for a needless chat."

However, Iwanaga still does not know much about that woman called Saki; not even her last name nor her kanji spelling.

She also has no idea about her position in society.

There is a limit to the information you can get from just rumors

inside the hospital.

It is likely, that even if Kurou talked about himself, he would not irresponsibly talk about his friend or acquaintance as he should know what is safe to talk about and what is not.

It is not like he is that thoughtless.

But when one is talking to young and charming nurses cheerfully, personally she would see it as being thoughtless.

“Anyways, you are clearly in single-status right now. Are you interested in trying for another meeting for a fresh start?”

“Can you just say what your main point is?”

“Would you go out with me, with the purpose of getting married? I’ve been holding on this one-sided love for the past 2 years, and I’ve been waiting for this moment to come.”

For Iwanaga, choosing to stand still when the chance has come to her does not suit her, so just like Kurou had asked, she skipped to the main point and looked right into Kurou’s eyes as she said it.

Kurou himself finally showed some interest in the girl sitting next to him. It would be fine if he kept his guard strong, but he did not even try to make a distance, instead readjusted his sitting posture and moved his gaze to her, from the whorl of her hair to toes, and then to the tip of her nose.

“Didn’t expect you are a straightforward type from your look. And bad at letting things go too, for waiting for 2 years.”

“Destiny is something that you can wait for.”

“But dating a middle-school girl is forbidden by law..”

“I just told you, I am 17, a high-school girl! Next year, I’m planning to take the entrance exam at your university. Is your memory capacity is equal to that of a chicken?!”

Her growth has been in stagnation since middle-school, hence, it is

not strange if she was mistaken as one, but this man might mean it for real.

“Oh, it looks like you often get mad the way normal people do.”

“How rude, only sometimes.”

Squids or octopuses change their body build according to the situation to protect themselves or attacking prey. Even human body does the same reacting to the current situation. Although, between that kind body change and this kind of body change, the things they indicate are somewhat different.

Kurou put the empty paper cup on the bench and tried to cover his mouth as he started to chuckle.

This person was laughing carefree, with a pleasant laugh.

Iwanaga who still a bit mad was charmed by it.

When she thought about it, this was the first time in her two years of one-sided love, she was standing so close to him and breathing the same air as him.

This time, it was not because of the body change that her heart was beating faster, so she played with her front hair to calm herself.

Kurou who was sitting beside her was still in small laughter as he turned his gaze to the dark distant sky.

“I was joking. That was quite fun. To be confessed by a high-school girl, I never thought someone would want me after getting dumped. It has been a while since I’m in this good mood.”

Hearing a positive-looking guy saying gloomy words made Iwanaga tilted her head.

“Saki-san must have said something really bad to you when she dumped you.”

“It is not Saki-san’s fault.”

“But still, she is the one who dumped you.”

Although she did not want to admit it, it seemed like Kurou still has some attachments left with Saki.

Two months had passed since they had broken up, so the only thinkable reason is either he is slow for a switch over or there is an inevitable reason for them to break up.

“We had been dating since around high school, and there was a time where we were in long-distance relationship but we managed to overcome it, I even went to met her parents at fall last year, and we’d talked about getting engaged next year too, and it felt like an avalanche just hit us when we had to break up.”

It was not a story that one would tell someone that one just met for the first time.

Perhaps he was trying to reject Iwanaga’s confession sincerely.

Or maybe he just wanted to clear up the feeling in his chest by turning them into words, telling someone his whole story which he had not been able to do before.

Since for him, Iwanaga who seems like a child is someone he would not meet anywhere else except for this hospital, so she would be a good listening partner for it.

Kurou put the fingers of his right hand on his forehead.

“There was nothing I could do. I mean, I get it in my head but there was a lot of things I still couldn’t come to believe. So, I don’t think I could date someone else for a while now.”

“Specifically?”

“Eh?”

Iwanaga suddenly lifted up the cane in her hand and pointed it close to Kurou’s nose tip.

“Specifically, what is the reason that made your relationship fell

unseemly into collapse just before your engagement?”

Rumor About Steel Ghost

It is not a strange thing if one does not know the names of ‘youkai-henge’.

Even more, if one is a girl.

Yumihara Saki knows names like Kappa and mermaid. However, she never heard the name [*Kudan*] until Sakuragawa Kurou told her about it.

Kudan. It is written [件] in kanji and is a youkai with a human head but a body of a cow. It can speak human’s words, and it is said it will die after predicting the future.

It sometimes predicts things like good crops harvest or house’s prosperity, but in most cases it predicts unfortunate things like poor crops, diseases or natural disasters and it will without a doubt hit the mark. It is said that Kudan that was born during the World War 2 had predicted the Japan’s lost in that war.

Kudan that speaks the future by exchanging it for its own life. This [Beast of Prediction] is the most famous among all other commonly known monsters and often used as a subject in novels by many well-known authors, but Saki had never heard about it.

She never thought in her reality life that such things that could not be proved their existence would affect her life like this.

The time where she would have to think carefully on how will she associate with a monster that has the power to see the future; she was surprised that she could imagine it coming.

It has been 2 and a half years since she broke up with Kurou and found a job, but she still could not forget things concerning the Kudan, the Kappa, and the mermaid.

Even though she is working as a police, a job where there is no romance or dream in it, an occupation at an organization that

operates on reality.

And today, as Saki was having a late lunch at the station's cafeteria, Terada of the crime division sat in the seat opposite of her with a serious face with only teacup in his hand.

"Yo, Yumihara. When I invited you for yakiniku before you said whenever you eat beef you'll recall your ex-boyfriend that you had broken up with in a bad fashion and it'll ruin your mood and declined me."

"Yes, I think I did."

Saki did not stop her hand that was digging on the beef kalbi set but she answered the monk-headed Terada as she looked at him in the eyes.

Terada has been working at Makurazaka Police Station, Makurazaka City where Saki is assigned for more than 10 years and is a sergeant.

He is a 5-Dan judo practitioner and is well-known as a strong opponent at the inter-station match.

With a huge and tall body like a wall of stone, smashed ear caused by practicing judo and very cold-looking lips, he is known as a skilled detective that would make even a veteran flinched at the first glance.

If only he tried to do the extra work, he would have been promoted by now. If only he could soften his glare by just a few percent, he would have found a marriage partner by now. Those are what people in the station had commented about him.

Saki is in the traffic division so she wears a uniform while working, and her works usually about handling cases like traffic accident so she often meets him due to work duty. After she took up the new post, she often gets called out and invited for a meal or drink.

Honestly, Saki thinks it as a bother so she went to consult about it obliquely with the personnel chief and the result was-

“There’s nothing much I can do. Yumihara-kun is Terada’s type after all. Just try to play along with him for now.”

Such response that Saki thought is an absolute lie when the personnel chief said he could not do anything about it. It is because she could not play along with him anymore that she wanted him to do something about it but the whole station is giving an atmosphere of supporting Terada-

“His face is scary but he is a good guy.”

“He is a late bloomer, and he’s giving his best to talk to you, you know.”

“Never heard he had a lover before or a hobby, so his saving should be quite a lot.”

since she was occasionally being told such supporting statements from them.

As for Saki, she keeps rejecting those invitations but Terada always kindly, never tries to resort to harassment. And she knows well that unlike his appearance or tone, he is a gentleman.

Even the fact that the whole station is giving their support had proved that he is a trustworthy man.

But this is a problem of taste, so there is nothing that could be done.

Her type is the complete opposite of the boorish Terada, is a perfect guy like her previous boyfriend, Sakuragawa Kurou whom she had broken up with in a cruel fashion, and her taste has not changed ever since.

Kurou was a dull and soft-looking young man and was shorter and one year younger than her and he was plain; like a mountain goat.

She was the one who brought up the topic of breaking up, but she still remembers him and their memories all these times.

They broke up when she graduated in early March, and today is

Thursday, September 20th. Two and a half years had passed ever since and she is already 25-year-old.

After her training at the police-training school and being made to chase things everywhere before getting used to her work after she was designated, she still recalls her times with Kurou sometimes, which made her resented herself for being weak-minded.

When that she heard about the rumors not so long ago; that his cousin that was admitted into hospital for a very long time had passed away, she thought that only if she passed away right before their trip to Kyoto, they would have to cancel their trip and such thing would not have happened; such selfish thought as she punched his pillow in the late-night.

There should be a limit on how weak-minded one could become.

“Well then, Yumihara, why are you eating that beef kalbi set?”

So Terada continued. Saki, still looking him in the eyes, answered without slowing down her chopsticks in hand.

“I thought that being haunted by the past won’t do me any good, so this is my positive effort of trying to overcome it.”

“So, can I invite you for some yakiniku again?”

“If possible, I don’t want to do such practice in a private time.”

“Okay, how about sushi? I’ve found a good place.”

“Fish dishes also reminds me of my previous boyfriend, so I rarely eat them.”

“How on earth did you break up with him that it had become this bad?”

Terada, rather than being angry, sounded more like being tired of it as he readjusted his sitting posture.

From Saki’s point of view, even if she kept on lying to decline Terada’s invitations, Terada could not complain about it even

though he did not find it pleasant as he is a gentleman at heart. It also means she can use that to her advantage.

“Even if it is lunch-time, asking your female-kouhai to explain about the reason of her broken past love, as a man and a senpai, I don’t think that others would think highly of that.”

Saki, while still continued to eat the beef kalbi like a robot, refused to explain the reason politely.

Terada who never fails at interrogating suspect for the past five years had no choice but to stay silent and then began to start spinning the teacup in his hand.

“But, to reject a fine woman like you, I’d doubt he is a good man, no?”

It looked like Terada still had not given up yet and tried to change Saki’s mind about the man.

A fine woman or not, Saki does not have such confidence about herself. Be it about appearance or about personality, she knows that she is not very woman-like that it always bugs her.

She had only dated Kurou, just one man so far in her entire life, and she is too tall for a girl that it troubles her. She even considered it as a minus point.

After breaking up with Kurou, she had shortened her hair that people could now see her nape; for which her hair used to be at her bottom-neck long.

There were also times when she was mistaken for a guy from behind when wearing casual clothes.

Once, someone from the headquarter came and saw Saki in her uniform and rumor was that he had been asking around about the female model who he thought was doing the station-chief-for-a-day role. Saki who does not lose in height even when she stands among the males in the station, often being teased or made fun of by them.

Terada probably has his own preferences, so, for now, she decided

to accept “a fine woman” statement as a praise, and corrected him where she thought should be corrected.

“No, it was me who dumped him. I think I did something really bad to him.”

“But that was because he wasn’t a worthy man, right?”

“We had introduced each other to our parents, and even planned to get engaged. Both our parents agreed on our idea of getting married after we both had graduated from university. We would have already been married by now. If we could get away with it without breaking up, we’d do that already. But we couldn’t.”

“Even if you looked at me in the eyes with that serious face, how do you expect me to take that story?”

“Please take it in a nice way. It’s simply the truth.”

Now that Saki had told him that much, Terada must be feeling that it might be better not to ask any further about Saki’s past, and decided to withdraw.

Saki up till today, had never talked to a single person about why did she break up with Kurou.

Even her friends who know the both of them well had attacked her with questions out of shock and suspicion, but she kept giving them unclear and vague answers.

If possible, she really wants to tell someone about it. She thought maybe that way she could sort out her own feeling and forget about Kurou eventually.

However, even if she talked about it, she does not think that anyone would believe her and she does not really sure whether it is alright to tell others about this kind of thing.

She just could not bring herself to say that “we broke up because of a Kappa”.

Before they even believe it, they would likely laugh about it first.

At least, if it was a less common youkai then it would make the story somewhat believable, but it is a Kappa; a creature well-known to almost everyone as harmless and pleasant. People might think she is crazy as she explains it to them.

And then if she continued the story with Kudan and mermaid she feels people would unpleasantly and slowly back off from her.

During the night of their trip to Kyoto, a Kappa that they had met when they walked along the Kamogawa River. Even today, just remembering it would give Saki goosebumps.

Normally, people would treat it as if they had mistaken it for something else, and there is nothing weird about it if they did, however, they could not deny the otherworldly vibe that they were feeling.

Saki was tremendously scared which was very unusual for herself, that she had clung on Kurou.

If Kurou too, were frightened at that time, or if he held her by her shoulder firmly, maybe their relationship would have remained unchanged.

But before Kurou could make any move, it was clear that the Kappa was staring at Kurou, as its hatchet face stiffened and its body taken aback, it started to groan as such.

“Ah, human is so scary. You human would eat anything, and would breed with anything. Giving a birth to such monster like you, ah, how scary.”

Afterward, the Kappa stumbled as it fled into the night.

The creature that Saki tried to deny its existence with all her might, had one look at the slightly unreliable-looking man next to her and then ran away without trying to do anything.

She could not help but to think about it. What exactly is her boyfriend, which that all-green thing which is called a Kappa just called him as a monster.

Terada put down his teacup.

“Ah, you see, actually, I’m not here to invite you for a meal. Nor that I’ve come here to say something sarcastic. Three days ago, you were the one that dealt with the accident case at X river, right?”

“It wasn’t just me alone, but what about it?”

Three days before, past 10 pm, an accident in which a car had broken through the guard rail and fell into X River near the outskirt of the city had happened. Saki was one of those at the scene.

If one had listened to the story it might sound like a big accident, but the guard rail itself was old and rusty, and the height difference between the road and the river is about 2 meter. But it was gently sloped, as the driver accidentally turned the steering down the slope and fell towards the river just like that. That was all.

The depth of the river is just almost 30 cm, so there was no danger of drowning. The car itself was soaked in the water so it could not be started again, but the 21-year-old student that was driving it only suffered a minor wound.

There was no other passenger nor any other victim and that student admitted his wrong, so the case was handled quite smoothly.

On the right side of that road is a mountain, and on the left side is an unpopular river so it did not lead to a traffic jam.

There were no injured nor dead people came out from this accident that may spell crime that would attract the interest of a detective. Even if there was something, asking Saki who was just in-charge of the inquiry is a weird thing to do.

“The cause of the accident was, he thought he saw a dog in front of him, so he immediately turned the wheel all the way, crashed into the guard rail and fell straight into the river; is what written but I heard at first he told a different story.”

As Terada’s voice became lower, Saki lifted and brought up the bowl of miso soup that came with her meal set to her mouth and answered with a cold tone.

“He must’ve talked in agitation since we just saved him from a car sunken in water. Afterward, the person himself denied it saying he remembered it wrong.”

“So, it is true then.”

“What is?”

“That the student at first said “a girl without a face holding steel beam about 2 meters long, wearing a standing out red and black frilled dress with a mini-skirt, and a huge ribbon on her head suddenly appeared in front of the car so he immediately turned the steering wheel towards the river” “.

Saki put the bowl down.

She did not turn away from Terada’s stare.

“He didn’t tell that kind of story that consists only the important points, but it is about right, mostly. Also, he added another characteristic of that girl; she has a big bust.”

Perhaps after the student had regained his composure, he had doubted that people would believe the story he had told and it would be troublesome if he was suspected of driving in the effect of alcohol or taking drugs, so he changed the thing that had appeared to a dog.

Such story had no problem in itself, so Saki wrote it down as such.

However, Saki never thought of denying the driver’s story in her head.

She felt that student’s fear was similar to hers at that time. Hence, she did not question him much and compiled the story he had told her in an innocuous way.

For some reason, Terada was trying to dig that story out.

“Terada-san, are you trying to find the [Steel Ghost Nanase]?”

(T/N: The original word is Koujin Nanase. Nanase is Nanase, a name.

Well, Koujin is.. Kou means steel and Jin means people or human. But this Nanase isn't a human anymore so I changed it to ghost.)

Saki without a smile on her face, mentioned a name that has been spreading as a rumor in Makurazaka City recently.

Terada, also without a smile on his face, lifted up his teacup as he answered her.

"If I could catch the mysterious person behind this [Urban Legend], I might receive a medal from the headquarter chief, don't you think?

In the end, would [Steel Ghost Nanase] really be nothing more but an urban legend? Saki does not think so.

After all, the meaning of the term itself is vague. Rather that an urban legend, its existence is much closer to a [Ghost Story].

In the beginning of this year, an idol died in Makurazaka City. Her name was Nanase Karin, and her real name was Nanase Haruko.

She was 19 at that time.

Saki had never known her name or her look until she heard about her death but it seemed like she was a popular idol that did gravure shots and often appeared in variety shows.

Due to a certain dark rumor, she had become the attention of the media in a bad meaning. So in order to run away from the media's hounding, she came to hide in a hotel in Makurazaka City which is quite a distance from Japan's main cities. But on January 30th, Saturday, she was found as a corpse buried under countless steel beams at a construction site just next to the hotel.

Even though it was within the city, the case was out of her station's jurisdiction, so she did not know much about the detailed investigation but for a countryside city with a population of about 500 000, inappropriate numbers of groups of reporters had marched into the city. She had to run everywhere handling the traffic and deal with the suddenly increased number of accidents, so Nanase Karin's name is stuck in her memory.

In the end, her death was concluded as an accident, considering the possibility of suicide is quite high due to the pursue from the media and the suffering from slander and libel from the rest of the society.

Not even a week has passed and her topic was nowhere to be heard.

No matter how surprising and unexpected her case was, that is the fate of an idol, if she could not show herself anymore, the majority of the people will lose their interest in the idol. Saki is also the same.

However, since about two months ago rumor about her, especially in this city, started spreading.

The ghost of Nanase Karin wearing the same costume back when she was an idol, carrying the very steel beam that crushed her in one hand, is rumored to be appearing night after night attacking people.

As if trying to take revenge on the society that had cornered her to her death.

And for the record, when they found her corpse her face was tragically crushed by the steel beams. That happened to be the reason of her ghost too, does not have a face.

At first, the rumor seemed to be circulating among middle school students, but not long after that the ghost was given a name [Steel Ghost Nanase]. That name which has a vibe around it, was introduced to the internet and later became a topic throughout the whole nation.

She had crawled out from under the pile of steel beams, swinging a steel beam unfitting her slim body as if its weight is nothing; such story is said had given her that [Steel Ghost] nickname.

Although it has become a nation-wide topic, it is only limited to the internet and neither that nickname nor her appearance was reported in the tabloids or television. It seems that its popularity among the common people is still low.

The youngsters who love to have fun sometimes went for a “field

trip" to the site where she was found dead but that is all there is to it.

When most of the society of the city consisted of elderly, the number of people who do not know are more than the people who do, it seemed.

Saki thinks she had heard about [Steel Ghost Nanase] but that is all. Until the accident happened 3 days ago made her recalled the faint memory about the rumor.

Haunted by a dark rumor, idol that ran away but then died and became a ghost. Not to mention, she became an evil spirit that swings a piece of steel with one hand. It would be a pretty interesting story to talk about.

She also heard about someone who gave her the name [Steel Ghost Nanase] somewhere.

Not [Iron Ghost] but [Steel Ghost], little different do they have but it was not a word one would find every day but it leaves a mark in one's mind.

(T/N: The word *Tetsujin* exists but *Koujin* does not. Think of it as Iron man and Steel man. You'd know Iron man but you'd never heard of Steel man.)

It is probably not wrong to say Nanase Karin became an urban legend because of that name attached to her.

Even then, they are all just rumors. Like the story of a woman with a ripped mouth, human-faced dog, vanishing passenger in the taxi and the woman who would cause an accident at the entrance of a tunnel; those legends born in the city are nothing but a ghost story.

If one were to pursue the original source of such story, one would only found vague and without a definite proof clue like "I heard it from my friend", " a friend of a friend of mine saw it", " my senpai's lover's friend really experienced it" or " the kouhai of one of my relatives' uncle happened to be there". There was not a single concrete evidence in them.

Born in the darkness of the city, a fairy tale to tell people indirectly the cold truth about the danger of such dark places.

It has a feel of reality to it, makes one wants to believe it, but when investigated thoroughly it should be nothing but a lie.

“Catching a ghost or a mysterious person is not a police’s job, so headquarter probably won’t be giving out a medal for it.”

Saki said that indifferently to Terada as she stuffed the beef kalbi into her mouth.

“What do you think?”

“Like I said, there is no medal.”

“Not about that. Do you really think a ghost called [Steel Ghost Nanase] or a mysterious person or something else is wandering around here?”

That was a question which Saki did not know how to answer but, she straightened her sitting posture and put her chopsticks down.

“That university student who was driving the car in the accident three days ago knows about the [Steel Ghost Nanase]’s rumor but it looked like he only realized what he saw when he was explaining about the situation to me. When he realized it, he denied the earlier story and gave a proper story about the cause of the accident.”

“It didn’t look like he was lying?”

“Whatever had appeared in front of him; a ghost or a stray dog, it won’t change the fact that it caused the accident, so I didn’t ask for more details. Since we work based on the assumption of ghosts, mysterious person do not exist, I didn’t call him back and determined the first story is a lie. Thus, I didn’t write it down.”

The one who was questioning the student about the accident was another officer in the first place.

The officer thought that such story would be meddlesome so the officer pushed him over to Saki mid-way.

For some reasons, the officer told Terada who is interested in [Steel Ghost Nanase] about the accident so Terada came to see Saki for the rest of the details.

“It is not like I’m trying to blame you, I just want to know, from your point of view, did he really saw a girl holding a steel beam, or did he not?”

Even if Terada said he was interested in it, it did not look like he was half-playing to search for it. Saki gave him a reply in an instance.

“He did. He saw something that isn’t normal so he turned the steering wheel to the wrong direction.”

The frightening look in the student’s eyes, The sudden steering change and the tire tracks, the guard rail that he broke through, and above all, the air around the river that had shaken Saki’s sense.

Something from out of this world was once standing there.

Ever since she met a Kappa at Kamogawa, she is somehow able to feel their presence strongly.

It is not that they had talked to her directly or did something that affected her daily life but she does not see the world as the same color as before.

That said, it was not like a special power is blooming within her and there is no way to use it practically. At most, the only thing that had changed is her personality, it became darker than before and she could not see things as they are right now.

It was not sure whether Terada was able to see Saki’s gloom but he nodded silently about one thing.

“It hasn’t become a case yet and there is no damage report made for it officially. But within the city, there are a few reports lodged at the police boxes about seeing a suspicious person that looks like [Steel Ghost Nanase] or almost being attacked by her.”

“Directly to the police boxes?”

When a rumor has been circulating around too long, sometimes it could affect the society in reality.

If a story of a mysterious person attacking kids and women had been spreading around, people would refrain themselves from going out at night, and school kids would go home in a group in response to such story.

But when such rumor even reached the police, Saki thought it as weird.

Not to mention, it was not something like a friend or an acquaintance who saw or met it, but the person himself/herself who saw or was attacked was the one that lodged the report.

“Currently, for most of them, the police told those people that they probably mistook it for something else, and teased them to kill some times. They dealt with such complaints not in a serious way. But somewhere around the middle of last month, there are a few cases of mysterious assault attempt in the city and also several cases of random attacking. Some of the victims fell over when trying to run away and scraped their knees. Only light wounds like that, no significant wound has been reported. Maybe, like that accident case three days ago, there are still victims out there that couldn’t say that they were almost being assaulted by a girl with big bust holding a steel beam.”

Probably in some cases, they do not even know what is attacking them; it is reflected in their eyes but their brain just could not tell them what it is.

In the middle of the night, meeting a girl wearing a standing out frilled dress, plus, that girl is swinging a steel beam around.

There is no one who could stay calm after seeing such scene.

“Terada-san, are you really thinking [Steel Ghost Nanase] is really out there, attacking people?”

If this staunch detective really thinks so, then he is really something.

Saki felt a cold sweat ran through her back. Whenever she thinks about those unknown monsters would influence her life again, she feels like her stomach had shrunken.

Terada opened his eyes to her after hearing Saki's voice stiffened unnaturally, and let out a bitter laugh.

"Oi, oi, it is not like I believe in ghost, even if they exist there is nothing I could do as a detective."

Then why is he gathering all these information?

"Even if there was no ghost, there are reports about people are witnessing it, almost assaulted by it. It is the truth behind it that we should look for. If it was just a rumor that people are getting assaulted and killed it wouldn't be a problem, but it is really weird that it now reached the police's ears. Such thing is not a ghost's doing, it's a living human's doing for sure."

After listening to his explanation, Saki let out a small breath.

It would be natural that people who had never experienced a life-changing experience about something that looks human but is actually not, would think that way.

This time, Saki laughed bitterly.

"So, what you mean is, someone somewhere is pretending as a dead idol night after night, hiding her face, wearing a dress, wandering around this city with a steel beam in one hand?"

"In order to show that big bust, I think that someone must have stuffed a lot of padding. That late Nanase Karin's bust size is said to be over 100 cm."

"That is big."

"It is. It is sure a hard-work pretending to be [Steel Ghost Nanase]. Well, it is not my kind of taste, though."

"Is that a sarcasm to silently say that my chest is small?"

“No, it isn’t.”

Putting the bust size matter aside, imitating the [Steel Ghost Nanase] is an impossible story.

If one was to believe the rumor and the witnesses, the steel beam that [Steel Ghost Nanase] is carrying around is about 30 cm longer than her own height, about 180 cm to 2 m.

If it is the real deal, it would probably weigh around 20 to 30 kg.

Even a muscular man could not rotate it around with only one hand.

Let’s say that someone made something that looks like a steel beam out of woods or polystyrene so that someone could carry it around with one hand, but going to all the trouble to make it just for that purpose is absurd.

On top of that, moving around with something that bulky, is not an easy thing to do, even with a car. It would stand out too much.

And then, wearing a bizarre costume like black and red frilled mini dress and a huge ribbon on the head.

Wandering around the city wearing such outfit without leaving many witnesses, that would really take extra cautions to make it worked.

If she is not a ghost that can appear and disappear freely, it sounds impossible to keep doing it for a long time.

“It seems too complicated to be a prank.”

Then, it feels like the idea of Nanase Karin’s ghost really appeared would make more sense.

Or it was just people were exaggerating about what they saw.

That is just how odd this [Steel Ghost Nanase]’s existence is.

Anyway, it is not something that police should take it seriously.

But Terada's opinion was different.

"That's where I think something off. If there is really a need to go that far to pretend as a ghost, there must be an important reason or a huge aim behind it. This isn't just a normal prank, probably a crime or something else."

Terada thinks [Steel Ghost Nanase]'s appearance as some kind of preparation for a big, bad crime.

The police officers working at the police boxes where the reports were lodged also felt something was off, and maybe some of them came to talk to Terada about it.

I see, so this is what they called a detective's intuition. I guess it's not because of his appearance that made him popular inside this station, to the level that they started to worry about him since he hasn't found a life partner yet.

"[Steel Ghost Nanase]'s rumor started about two months ago. It seems like it was about the same time as people started to call her with that name. Direct testimony about her and the damage she had caused in this city started around two weeks ago. On the net, the information about her on blogs or any related sites suddenly increased around that time. There was enough time to make preparation in that period between them. Preparation like making the outfit and the steel beam. It only started to move recently."

"Do you have any clue on why would someone play as a big-busted ghost?"

"No, I don't yet. For something like this, I can't go out investigate it openly. I'll have to collect information with utmost care. A detective taking rumor seriously isn't cool either, but there is definitely something happening. Lately, countryside cities tend to be breeding ground for criminal syndicates. Even in a city like this, the number of cases of teenagers caught taking drugs escalated, you know? *It is because* they are rumors among kids, that they might have some truth in them. Someone needs to set up the antenna for them before it's too late."

Terada emptied his teacup after finishing his sentences.

“I’d be glad if you could lend me a hand. You don’t have to do something extraordinary. Just collect information on rumors inside this city and on the internet naturally. Right now I’m marking places where that [Steel Ghost Nanase] had appeared on the map. I think maybe there’s a pattern.”

Superiority. Seeing things that others could not, doing things that other would not bother. For a detective, one just has to start moving once there is a case. Even though he does not know which station’s jurisdiction does this case will fall to, Terada has never thought of putting his guard down.

As for Saki, it is not like she is reluctant to lend him a hand, it is just that she knows one truth that Terada does not.

“Terada-san, please, at least, don’t forget this and keep it in your heart. That is, the possibility of things like ghost, youkai exist in this world. When such things lurk around, you can feel their ominous and unrest presence as if something bad was about to happen.”

“Huh?”

Saki could feel it. That this [Steel Ghost Nanase] is a real thing. A real ghost, without such second intention like crime plot or a scheme.

Whatever happens in the future, it is not something that police could deal with.

“If this ghost that people saw, reported for attacking people is really the ghost of Nanase Karin that died in January this year, then the only thing that should be done is an exorcism ritual. Your effort might end in vain if you keep at searching for it.”

Maybe because he did not expect Saki to say something like that in a dead serious tone, Terada who was getting up from the chair stopped his movement and stared at her for quite some time.

“What’s this? Yumihara, don’t tell me that you’re the type that

believes in those things?"

"I've never seen a ghost before, but it is because I've seen a youkai before."

"What are you talking about? If you don't want to help you can just say so, you know? I'm the one that asking the impossible here. It is just that, when you were handling that case, I heard you took care of the driver very seriously. So, I thought maybe you'd understand."

"No, I'll lend you a hand, but I'm telling you to keep in mind that, such things exist in this world."

It was probably useless even if she said it. When the world's rule that one had been believing simply bent in another direction, one would live an uneasy life, fearing that it would one day happens again. Someone who did not live such life, can not feel the atmosphere where those things exist.

Saki closed her eyes once, pinched the area between her eyebrows with her fingers and met with Terada's unrefined face again.

"Anyway, please be careful. If you treat it as something that is different than the logic of our world, it might save you one day."

To add a bit to the persuasion, Saki continued by saying this.

"It's because I never thought it that way, that I ended up breaking up with my ex-boyfriend."

And it seemed like it had an effect on him.

"Is your ex-boyfriend a youkai or a ghost or something?"

"I don't know how should I say it. He is something much better, or maybe something much worse."

Things like he once ate something that could be called a monster aside, Saki really does not sure how should she categorize Kurou who is feared by a youkai like Kappa.

Saki herself could not answer that question for all these time. She tried thinking of everything she could use to explain it, but she just could not find the right word.

Saki said “excuse me” to Terada while looking a bit impolite as she hold her mouth with one hand and dashed towards the washroom.

She had thrown up almost half of the beef kalbi set that she just ate.

It is not like every time she eats beef she would remember about Kurou.

Kurou is not at fault here but somehow there are things that she could not accept mentally yet.

When she got out of the washroom, the huge Terada was waiting while keeping his body small.

(T/N: Something like crossing your arms tightly, or putting your hands inside pockets while keeping your arms tightly to your body)

He was curious so he went after her, but of course, he could not enter the female’s washroom but he felt reluctant to return to the cafeteria so he just stood there.

And also, waiting in front of woman’s washroom must be giving him an uneasy feeling too.

(T/N: He did not wait outside of the washroom, there’s a distance between him and the washroom. It’s like he followed her from a distance but immediately stopped right after Saki entered the washroom.)

“Guess it’s true when you said you couldn’t eat meat. Want me to get you something to drink?”

“No, it’s fine. Can’t let you go through that trouble for me. I was a bit careless, that’s all.”

Although she was still feeling heavy in her chest and also her stomach as she just vomited, she straightened her resolution along with her back as she lifted a hand to refuse him.

If she took Terada's kindness for granted, she could imagine there would be rumor spreading inside the station later. Most likely, they all are going to look at the both of them with a warm heart.

"Anyway, Terada-san. Something that is out of world's logic exists. You must not ruin your career by concerning yourself with it too much. Please be extra careful."

Not sure whether Terada is amazed at Saki's persistent words or is tired of them, but he gave a smile looking like he understand what is she trying to tell him.

"Okay, understood. I understood well enough that you had a really complicated past love story."

"Well, the only thing that is complicated was about the result of it ."

Understanding each other is a difficult thing. It really hurt Saki in the heart that she still could not understand Kurou even after dating him for more than five years.

In the end, Saki promised to give Terada her cooperation before they parted, and Saki went to order another meal set that does not have any meat inside it at the cafeteria and returned to her traffic work afterward.

Terada might have asked for her cooperation purely because of work, or maybe he wanted to increase his chance to talk to Saki in order to get closer to her, whichever it is, leaving the matter as it is, does not sit well with her.

To be honest, becoming closer to Terada and concerning herself with the monsters; both matters make her feel tired.

But seeing people next to her get deeply wrapped up with it and later ended up losing trust in the world is even worse.

One should, at least, prepare a way out that would save oneself at some point.

(T/N: She is talking about Terada)

That day, there was no big accident or big case so Saki's work ended at 9.30 pm and made her way back to home.

Finding information on [Steel Ghost Nanase] during her working time is kind of awkward, so she thought of getting home as soon as she could and get start with it.

After the accident three days ago, she only took a look briefly at the summary because she did not want to investigate any further than that, fearing that she might see "them" again. Thus, she tried to not to think much about it.

Wearing gray trousers and a bag of the same color on her shoulder, she left the station.

The place where she lives is about 10 minutes walk from the police station, a 15-year-old one-room apartment located on high ground. Surprisingly, it has an auto-lock.

Usually, station workers who do not live with their family or anyone else would be living in the station's dormitory but the dormitory itself was already old and full, so she is living outside on her own. The apartment was fine, the rent is affordable, the only minus point is she had to spend an endless 10 minutes climbing the hill from the station to her home.

Riding a bicycle down the hill to work would be fun, but going back home would be frustrating.

There is not a single house can be seen until one reached the top. On one side of the road is a wall, and on the other side passed over the guard rail one could see a great look-down view of the city. Although it was really pretty, she had enough of it after seeing it every day.

After it gets dark, that one-way road becomes a lonely and quiet road that even if there is a police station nearby it still makes women feel restless when passing through it.

Saki walked along the usual asphalt road shined by the street lights

that lined up at an interval as she climbed the hill.

It would be a lie if Saki said she is not afraid walking the road at night.

Rather, now that she knows about those otherworldly beings, perhaps she is more afraid than a normal person do.

But there is no way she could avoid from walking at night in her life.

Then, she would just have to walk it without slacking, enough to build up some resistance towards it.

So Saki, with her slender legs, walked with a fast pace like an automaton or cyborg through the dark road.

There were a few times she got startled by people of the apartment who, like her, was climbing the hill trying to get home.

She wondered how much longer that she would have to be scared of the darkness, of the unknown world.

If she could forget about Kurou, will those youkai's existence fades away from her reality?

Saki thought as the night winds blew at her in that slightly warm September.

At that moment, she heard a voice coming from uphill direction.

"U-waah."

Although there was a weird pause it was a scream for sure, she thought.

The next moment, something that looked like a launched dodgeball came falling in Saki's direction.

Even with the light from the street light that only shines a particular spot, she knew what it was.

It was a person. And it was a girl with a small build.

Saki quickly reacted to catch and stop the falling girl.

Losing balance and fall rolling down in such bad-looking way is not an impossible story, but that was the first time Saki saw someone doing it.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes, compared to the pain of being deflowered, this much is nothing.”

“Why are you bringing up that kind of clear example at a time like this?”

“Well, that was the most painful experience for me, so there’s nothing else I could’ve said.”

So the girl had said, but Saki never thought that a young girl like her would say something like that.

But if she could say such weird thing, then her body and also her mind should be alright.

“I don’t know who you are or where’d you came from, but for the time being, you’ve saved me.”

The girl fixed her beret that she had pushed down securely to her head so it would not fall as she rolled down. Calmly refused Saki’s hand to help her getting up, she supported herself using the cane and stood up.

Her left leg’s movement was stiff, perhaps from the fall or perhaps it was already like that from the beginning.

As she was standing, it revealed her prominent small body figure.

The different in height between her and Saki should probably be around 30 cm.

Looking at her face, she was very child-like and lovely like a

Japanese porcelain doll and looked like an adorable princess that was brought up with the tenderest care.

But her vigorous looking eyes, and lips that did not show any sign of discomposure gave a feeling as if her experience is backing up that calm appearance of hers.

Saki could not guess the girl's age. If the girl said she is a middle school student, Saki would satisfy with it, and if the girl said she is older than Saki then Saki would also accept it. That is just how weird this girl's existence is.

"I don't know who you are or where'd you come from, but"

The girl brushed the dust off her green and white soft-looking cardigan and skirt, fixed her front hair that was covering her right eye and then looked upward towards Saki and repeated her words.

"I won't say anything bad, but please run away."

"From what?"

The girl moved her gaze towards the top of the hill. There, on top of the hill, was another silhouette of a human.

Saki's breath stopped for a moment.

There was a big ribbon on the head of the human silhouette.

It was wearing a dress with a mini skirt that shows clearly its body line and its thighs but the dress' shape did not crumble at all as if its shape is being held by wires inserted into the dress.

The dress was woven in black and red color and its design was to emphasize the wearer's slim hips.

And, its right hand was carrying a long object next to its body with its end pointed down a little.

At one look, it looked like it was carrying a naginata.

(T/N: Naginata is something like long sword with a long handle like

a spear)

But it was, without any doubt, a steel beam.

10 cm in width, about 2 m in length H-shaped piece of steel.

With one swing, that piece of steel looked like it could crush human's skull like a tomato. The very same heavy piece of steel that is used in construction work.

The human silhouette hit and put down one of the steel beam's end on the asphalt road and slowly walked down the hill as it dragged the steel beam together with her making a dull *guon*-sound.

Underneath the chest part of the dress that emphasized its cleavage, the two huge swellings swayed accordingly as she walked.

"Steel ghost, Nanase-"

The ghost of an idol that ran away from the society's critic, but died tragically crushed under a pile of steels.

Hearing Saki muttered the name with a dry throat, the girl moved her eyebrows a little.

"So you know about her."

"I really wish I don't however."

Her appearance and her outfit were exactly the same as the rumor she had heard.

On top of that, Saki could see it clearly, that there was no face.

Even under the little light in a dark night, it was clear.

It was not like it was hidden under a mask or it was painted with make-up to cover it.

Like smashed flattened meat; the face of that 'thing' which was walking down the hill with a steel beam in its hand, was nothing but black.

That is not a human being. It is something that has two legs, coming from a different world.

Saki did not expect to encounter it before Terada does.

Maybe this is the fate of people who have some kind of relationship with Kurou.

“Please run now. That is not an illusion, nor a prank of someone with a weird taste. That is that kind of beings, those that we called a ghost, a monster or a youkai.”

The girl, with an indifferent tone, said without removing her stare from the ‘urban legend’ that was still closing in.

“I know. I could tell from this atmosphere it’s the real thing.”

“Those huge knockers are the real things too.”

“That is not the problem here?”

This Nanase Karin is a more ominous being than a Kappa.

Her feet was paralyzed and her heart was beating fast.

If that kind of thing suddenly being lighted by the headlight, it would not be a strange thing if one would turn the steering wheel as hard as one could.

“Is this some kind of joke? I’ve had enough.”

Saki murmured. The word “eh” came out from the girl’s mouth as she turned around to Saki.

Saki’s retina was like burning with fire as her gaze was fixed on the steel ghost Nanase.

She is afraid of the night and she is afraid of those monster.

If she could run away, then she would do that.

But at the same time, as her heart screamed “haven’t you played with my life enough already?! Now cut it out!” as she felt an anger

within herself.

She had run from the Kappa and she had run from Kurou.

As a result, she was living a pessimistic life.

Saki threw away her thought and the bag hanging mid-way on her shoulder to her side and dashed forward, towards Steel Ghost Nanase.

As a police officer, she never misses training her body all these time. Even for her clothes and her shoes, she always chooses something that would allow she to move around quickly so that she could deal with the situation right away.

She could even win against a murderer holding a dangerous weapon.

This is a good chance, she thought.

If she did not think that way, then what was she about to do is a total absurdity.

I'll fight against this monster head on. I'll beat this steel ghost and get rid of my fear and my hesitation right here this very night.

The Steel Ghost Nanase in front of her slowly stopped her feet and without even preparing swung the steel beam with only right hand horizontally.

Saki bent her body while trying not to leave too much space, and the blunt object went past her.

The invisible cold air had just passed above her head.

Saki took a breath only half-way as she tried to hit the Steel Ghost Nanase before the ghost could swing the steel beam right back at her using a backhand, and threw her fist towards Steel Ghost Nanase's toned abdomen.

Although her opponent was a girl or even a ghost, she did not hold back a tiny bit at all.

But her fist slipped through. It was not because it got dodged, but like trying to touch a hologram image, Saki's hand just passed through Steel Ghost Nanase's abdomen.

Immediately it came to her mind.

That Steel Ghost Nanase is a ghost spirit.

And spirit could not be touched directly, and could go through wall and ceiling. A fact that is well-known for so long.

The steel beam that missed her earlier was once again fiercely swung towards her.

She bent and managed to narrowly dodge it but her jacket got caught on the narrow part of the H-shape and it made her stance to collapse and fell on the asphalt road.

Since the whole place was a slope and her legs were still not in a stable state, she could not stand up immediately. Steel Ghost Nanase easily held the steel beam aloft.

This is absurd. The fact that human could not touch a ghost, but ghost could do things that could affect human.

"That's why I told you to run away!"

The moment Saki had prepared herself for the pursuing attack of the steel beam, that girl with her small body, rammed Steel Ghost Nanase using her shoulder, and the dress-wearing ghost was sent flying.

Steel Ghost Nanase's bosom shook violently as it had to take a few steps forward to stop itself after receiving the ramming impact.

The girl also seemed to be unable to keep her stance, landed on her knees and fell forward.

Quickly, she used her cane to get herself up back.

Steel Ghost Nanase, like a rubber doll, returned its body posture back to normal.

It had fixed its grip on the steel beam but as if it was satisfied with just attacking them, it vanished with a puff.

It was not like it had dashed away or flew away to somewhere else, just simply vanished like a fog or a haze or an illusion. Like a real ghost would do.

“It looked like it had retreated. But I thought it isn’t something that could be the defeated with force alone.”

The girl flopped down and sat on the road, and said with an eager tone.

Saki got herself up, picked up the beret that the girl dropped when she rammed the ghost and moved closer towards the girl.

“I couldn’t touch that thing at all, why were you able to touch it? Are you a youkai or some sort too?”

The atmosphere around her was mysterious, but there was no feeling of fear or ill-omened about her.

She looked enigmatic but she also looked like a human.

Saki while trying to keep a little distance as she stayed on her guard, held out the beret to her. The girl, looking somewhat bashful, reached out her hand.

“Ah, no, I guess I can say I’m somewhere in the middle.”

Right after she said that, as she was trying to get up using the cane as a support her left leg fell off, making a *gakon!*-noise that blood-running human flesh would not make as it hit the road.

Her left leg just a bit over her knee had been disconnected.

It was too sudden Saki was shocked that she did not even let out a voice.

Maybe this girl is not human after all.

“Please do not worry, it’s a prosthetic leg. It is designed to detach

itself when under too much load. Because if it didn't, it might hurt my body."

While still standing on just one leg, the girl took her beret from the dumbfounded Saki's hand, and cheerfully said such as she put back the beret on her loosely wavy hair that extended till her shoulder.

After that, she bent down, grabbed the prosthetic leg and nimbly moved towards the guard rail with one leg and set her hips on it.

There, she began to reattach the prosthetic leg that was put on it a long sock, thus from far one could not tell them apart between it and a real flesh leg.

Saki could no longer tell what was going on anymore.

The girl of unknown age having an artificial leg and was able to touch a ghost.

From her look and her clothes, she looks like a well-raised up girl.

But a well-raised up girl doing something like walking on a long sloped road in the middle of the night, is somehow unthinkable.

It would make better sense if this girl was a youkai too.

"I don't know you are or where you are from, but dear brave one, please forget things that happened today. I'll do something about that Steel Ghost Nanase some time soon. As that is the reason I came here for. I'm asking you to not to contact the police about this, and please keep the matters about me a secret as well."

The girl politely bowed and was about to take her leave but, Saki who managed to hold back her fear grabbed the girl by her arm just in time as she flashed her police identification card to the girl.

"Let's hear about it in details at the station. It is just down the hill."

"What the deuce-"

Saki was not sure if she could say that the girl was unlucky tonight, or maybe she was the one who is unlucky.

She could not hand the girl over to Terada just like that, not after all that happened, but she could not just let her go either.

Saki herself does not wish to run away from this youkai.

If she did, who knows how many years will she continue to live with this ill and distrust feeling.

“That leg’s aside, there must be bruises or scratches here and there. Let’s get them treated. Don’t worry, I don’t plan to write a record, or unreasonably try to contact your family. There was already a case of accident that is thought to be caused by Steel Ghost Nanase but it already got ignored.”

“Yumihara Saki from Traffic Patrol Division… Are you by chance, *Saki-san*?”

The girl at first was surprised seeing Saki’s Police ID, but now she seemed to be surprised to see her full name on the rank division card.

“Uh, I don’t really get what you’re saying.”

Well of course Yumihara Saki is Saki.

The next moment, the girl looked at Saki’s face intently with an opened mouth.

“I see, your hair is shorter now and you seem to have lost some weight too. Ah, that’s why I didn’t realize. A-ah if I knew it was Saki-san I wouldn’t have gone and saved her. Ah, but I wouldn’t just watch and let her die, though.”

Saki was somehow pissed off so she smacked the girl’s head once. Only with an amount of force enough to be called a joke.

“Explain it so I can understand. You, do you know me? As for me, I don’t have any memory of you at all.”

The girl who was holding her head like it was hurt threw out her chest with proud-looking smile.

“We have met once before, but this is the first time that we introduce ourselves. My name is Iwanaga Kotoko. Sakuragawa Kurou-senpai’s current girlfriend.”

The word “current” was being emphasized. Before anything else, Saki gave the girl another smack. But this time, it might not end up with just a joke.

After hesitating for a while, Saki decided to drag Iwanaga Kotoko not to the police station but to her house on the fifth floor of her apartment building.

She did not want her to speak about her ex-boyfriend nor his name to the people at the station and she personally had a mountain of questions that she needs to ask her.

Iwanaga too had easily agreed upon being brought to Saki’s apartment and walked up the hill. Looking at the way she was walking, no one would have guessed that she has a prosthetic leg.

When Saki asked her about her age, she answered it is 19, and she is currently studying at the same university as Kurou and Saki was.

She said she had met her before at the hospital, but Saki could not remember anything about it at all.

“You said you’re Kurou-kun’s girlfriend, that was a lie right?”

“It has been two and a half years since he broke up with Saki-san. He is already 24-year-old this year, it is fine for him to get a new girlfriend, right?”

“I asked because you are not his type.”

“He got rejected badly by his type of girl, perhaps that turned his preference towards a completely different direction.”

Iwanaga replied with a composed face as she drank the instant-coffee that Saki had made for her in a cup.

Even if she does look like a princess that was brought up with the

tenderest care, her way of speaking is something else.

Now that she thinks of it, she had heard that Kurou's cousin had passed away. Maybe Kurou had used that as a starter to talk the girl that he had put on a distance between but now he is in a distress as she sticks with him and follows him everywhere. That might be the case right here.

Saki who does not like to have many things only had the minimum items that are needed for daily use in her room.

It had not been a year passed yet since she was sent to Makurazaka Police Station but she did not have the time to increase the things in her room except for things related to her work.

When Iwanaga first set her foot inside the room, her eyes were saying "what a room, it doesn't have a feeling of someone actually lived in here" as she had taken a look around the room but it seemed like Saki deliberately made such temporary-residence-like atmosphere herself.

There was a television inside the room but it had only been turned on less than a few hours for the past week.

It was a room where the echo from the noise that refrigerator made can be heard clearly.

Saki made Iwanaga sat on a chair in front of a table that she usually use for dining or to do her works when using a laptop while she just leaned her hips against the kitchen with a mug in her hands.

"Then, take a look at this intimate picture of Kurou-senpai and me, and see for yourself."

Iwanaga said as she pulled out her mobile phone and opened it before she gave it to her.

From the screen of the phone she had just taken, there was definitely a picture of Kurou and Iwanaga linking arms and looking so close.

They must have asked someone to take this picture for them.

“Kurou-kun sure made quite a sour face. He didn’t look very happy to me.”

“Senpai is a shy person.”

“I’ll tell you, such lie won’t work with his ex-girlfriend who dated him for more than 5 years.”

She could not see the real relationship between the two of them, although, from the picture, she could tell that Kurou and Iwanaga are not a stranger to each other.

But it also showed that her guess of him being in a distress might hit the mark.

After Iwanaga closed her mobile phone and put it on the table, Saki asked.

“So, how’s Kurou-kun doing now?”

“He is still at the university since he continued to postgraduate study. He said now that he wasn’t going to get married with Saki-san there was no need to hurry and find a job. I bet he just wanted to stay and spend more time with me at the university.”

“He had planned on doing postgraduate long before that. He even considered it when planning for the wedding.”

“But the wedding didn’t happen. Because you had run away from Kurou-senpai.

Fufun, as she said looking proudly as if she had won.

Saki’s expression turned sullen and she readjusted her fingers on the mug. She wondered how much did this girl know.

“What else could I do. I’d never thought that he is not a human.”

She was only saying that to test how much did the girl knows, but it sounded like she was only putting the blame on Kurou so she quickly continued.

“Sorry, that was too much to say.”

After that continuation, she wondered to whom exactly she was apologizing.

At least, she knew that it did not feel like she was saying it to Iwanaga.

Iwanaga was only staring at the surface of the liquid inside the cup that she was holding with her small hands and as if she knew what was in Saki’s mind, she answered with a voice containing her feeling of being considerate.

“No, it wasn’t really far off the mark. Kurou-senpai while still has his human-like sides, I don’t think that he could be categorized as a human. But then, the youkai and such are scared of him so it is hard to say that he is one of them.”

Iwanaga knows almost everything about Kurou. Rather, she noticed and could see the value that he has. What on earth is this girl exactly?

“Well, I’m also something pretty similar. So, we make a good combination, don’t you think? Therefore, I will assume you now understand that you are not in a position where you can say anything about our relationship.”

Something pretty similar, she just declared such herself openly to Saki but she still did not know its exact meaning. She did say something about coming here to deal with Steel Ghost Nanase. She could touch those things that are not from this world.

“What are you?”

“I am the goddess of wisdom for those beings called youkai, ayakashi, ghost and demon. You can think of it as a miko that acts as an arbitrator for their troubles.

“I thought a miko isn’t supposed to get deflowered?”

“But, it was Kurou-senpai who forcefully..”

“Kurou-kun isn’t capable of such forceful things.”

He is a simple and passive guy, but whenever she needs him to be by her side, he will do whatever it takes to stay beside her; he is that kind of person.

If he could really do something forcible, then thing probably would not be this complicated and ended up parting away.

What was the conversation is all about again? Right, it is about Iwanaga Kotoko.

She is a mediator specialized for the monsters, perhaps Saki could call her as a negotiator.

Aside from it is out of common sense, she could not deny the things that she said.

And she knows it very well herself, that common sense is useless in this matter.

“That is not the issue right now, is the police already began to start the investigation on the Steel ghost Nanase?”

Iwanaga asked as her expression suddenly changed into a serious one.

If they kept talking about Kurou, it would only bring out more issues. Maybe that was why she tried to change the course of the conversation.

But it is the truth that the reason she came to Makurazaka City is because of the Steel Ghost Nanase.

And someone whose appearance looks like a princess should not be able to do something like ramming herself towards a ghost swinging an H-shaped steel.

If she could do something about it, then it is best to leave it to her.

As for Saki, she already had this trouble of thinking about how should she makes Terada give up on this matter. And there was no

reason for her to hide any information too.

Saki put her mug in the kitchen and crossed her arms somewhere above her belly.

“There is one detective who noticed about the strange things happening in the city and started to investigate on it. That person himself doesn’t believe in ghost at all, so if we left him just like that, something really bad might happen.”

“How about a damage report?”

“Officially, there is none yet. Maybe it’s only a matter of time now. The Steel Ghost Nanase we met earlier was more aggressive than the rumor had said. If we let it be just like that, almost no doubt there will be a murder case happening soon.”

“Yes, I’m afraid so too. There is a need to deal with it as soon as possible.”

The girl with an artificial leg agreed, looking so concerned about the matter which Saki could not do anything about even if she wanted too, but there was one other thing that bothered Saki so much.

“But, whether it is a youkai or an unknown person hiding behind the urban legend, was there any other cases like this one, where it clearly appears before people and become a case that would involve the police? For something like ghost that appears before a haunted curve, or Kappa that drowns people to death, or the cursed *Shichinin Misaki*, they could be treated as just a coincidence or an accident, or can also be put away as a story of a confused person or a hallucination, but this one, it is not a case where the culprit is not something visible, uncertain and vague.”

There are victims came out from this, and she can felt the angry ghost or the youkai’s existence but it was hard to make something clear out of it.

She could think it as someone who lost a screw in the head’s doing and she could also think it as a devil that had come down to earth.

Then, why not just tell the story with mysterious and eerie shadows behind, and the story would remain much longer, and in a wider range.

Because it was vague, one would think it as a ghost, as a youkai.

No one spoke about them in the open, and they never appear during the daylight, and they are terrifying beings.

Cases of drowning by an unknown cause that are said to have something to do with Kappa just like one that Saki once met, although it is very rare it happens sometimes and often being put away as an accident and just like that slips into people's daily life.

And for the unknown cause part, it probably would leave an uneasy feeling for someone who is close to the victim.

But then, there is no definite proof to say it is the work of a Kappa, and the police also would not do anything about it and no one would take them seriously when they try to talk to someone about it.

Thus, it remained unsolved giving an ill-feeling but it emphasized the ominous shade of color in their heart where the story remained.

But now, Steel Ghost Nanase is different. If it became a series of cases where it beats people to death, it is no easy way to clean this up.

It will be an event where the police will have to move and start a proper investigation, and it would not easily disappear from people's memory for sure.

It has not turned into that kind of horrible accident yet, but testimonies of people saying they have seen the Steel Ghost Nanase with their very own eyes are being brought in to the police.

And its eccentric appearance is befitting the nature of this case.

Is it even alright for such demon with strong self-assertion to exist?

In this modern days, are there still any people who would believe that thing which clearly exist, as a ghost or a youkai?

“You sure have a good perspective in this. A normal monster is more reserved and acts after observing its surrounding and situation. That one isn’t normal, which is why those extremely humble ghosts and monsters that have been living in this region for a long time were scared and troubled when ‘that’ appeared, and went out of their way to come and see me who live over hundreds of kilometers away and requested to do something about it.”

“Can’t the monsters do something about the monsters’ problem themselves?”

“Like I said, Steel Ghost Nanase isn’t normal. Be its existence or its power.”

What a complicated story. And when things get complicated, those ‘things’ went and requested their goddess of wisdom to go in person and stop it; it does make sense.

However, that is only if, she really recognized this girl called Iwanaga Kotoko as someone who stands between human and the shadows.

Iwanaga also thought it as a real bother and frowned.

“If that wasn’t the case, I wouldn’t bother myself to come to unfinished city area like this.”

“Coming down this far, you say? Isn’t our university is in a rural city too?”

“But it is a city designated by government ordinance.”

Saki could not deny that Makurazaka city is a city still in development. But that so-called *city designated by government ordinance* is doing deficit financing and now is suffering from it.

Saki threw out a sigh and mentioned about one more unclarified issue.

“One more thing, why isn’t Kurou-kun with you? He is feared by those monsters, a human-like something that isn’t human. Isn’t it normal for him to come along if it is a monster extermination? If you are his girlfriend, then he would surely follow you even if you said no.”

Even if Kurou is not her boyfriend, he does not have that kind of personality to watch someone who he knows walks into a danger.

Even for someone who seems to have the nerve stronger than a steel beam like Iwanaga Kotoko, he definitely would not let his university-kouhai who is using a prosthetic leg and walks around using a cane to go alone by herself.

“I was planning to finish it within the day so I thought it’d be fine if I didn’t tell him.”

“Considering your personality, I bet you’d ask him like asking to go for a trip. Something like- *let’s go for sightseeing while we’re at it.”*

“Kurou-senpai is, right, he contracted an infectious disease that requires him to report it to the officials.”

“Why are you saying it while looking away?”

“Another cup of coffee, please.”

“Don’t try to change the topic.”

Iwanaga who was acting all cheeky before was just looking at the ventilation fan as she made a sulking lip.

“It is just Kurou-senpai, has been missing since last week and without a single call. I left messages to his cell phone’s answering service but no reply. And this, the last message that was sent to me.”

Iwanaga pushed a few buttons on her mobile phone, opening the message inbox and selected one of the messages before showing it.

It was sent on August 24th, at 17:18. The sender is Kurou-senpai and without a title, consisted only one line.

[*Something came out. Don't look for me*.]

"I'm pretty sure that you are being hated by Kurou-kun."

"It is just that Kurou-senpai isn't good at expressing his own feeling."

"I already told you such lie won't work."

Iwanaga who seemed to be feeling restless inside her heart about the content of Kurou's message turned her head downward and put her forehead on the table.

It even made Saki, who was the one saying such things, restless too.

Kurou, for good and bad, is a gentle person. He does not have it in him to hate other people or getting mad furiously at someone.

But his approach towards Iwanaga seemed somehow without any mercy and he is not even trying to hide his feeling.

Even if he hated her right from the bottom of his heart, that would also mean deep inside his heart, he is trusting and opening up to her.

She could not make herself calm. She found it hard to accept that the man that she broke up with a few years ago is doing well with a girl that is the complete opposite of her.

It's worrying."

"What is?"

"About Kurou-kun's missing without any contact. It doesn't feel like he is trying to disappear."

"Well, yeah, but I could say it isn't like I don't have any clue about it at all, right, it isn't something that an old girlfriend of his has the right to worry about anymore."

Iwanaga gave a half-hearted answer in a vague way, as she fluttered her hand without lifting her head from the table.

After that, she slowly raised her head.

“Besides, he won’t die even if someone killed him. Rather, it is likely to be the one who tries to kill him is the one that would find it very unpleasant. Unless it is very serious, he’d come back alive for sure.”

(T/N: If you haven’t read the manga, you will have no absolute idea of what she meant by them. That manga has more spoilers than I’d imagine)

From that statement, Saki could guess that the girl knows about Kurou’s unique ability that even made monsters ran away from him.

Kurou’s power that is related to Kudan and mermaid; she knows about it.

Knowing that, she still approached him.

It might be that, although she looked like she was not worried, but actually she is keeping all the worry and suffering to herself, and is mad at Kurou for not trying to rely on other people.

It seemed to her that this girl really loves Kurou.

Saki could feel it even though she was restless about it.

Iwanaga is doing things that Saki once could not do naturally.

No matter how out of human logic her burden is, she did not run away.

“I guess you’re right. I shouldn’t be meddling in Kurou-kun’s affair anymore, and I also got works to do.”

They never even exchange new year cards after they had broken up, and Saki could not imagine what kind of face should she make if they were to meet each other.

“Also, about Steel Ghost Nanase, it isn’t the work for the police. There is nothing fun in trying to get involved with those being that aren’t human. Although, that goes without saying.”

Iwanaga put her mobile phone back into her pocket and got up from the chair. Then, she put onto her head the beret that was on her lap and moved with the hair in front of her right eye up and down.

“I will try to solve it as fast as I could, but if you happen to met Steel Ghost Nanase again, this time, please run away without giving it a second thought. It hasn’t turned into that kind of evil spirit that would chase someone everywhere till it kills the person yet.”

As for Saki, she is not that daring to face someone who she could not even touch without any plan twice.

Then, what about Iwanaga?

“It goes the same with you too, can you really do something about that monster with that body of yours? not just that left leg, your right eye is artificial too, right?”

She was half-bluffing as she *pon!*-hit her forehead with her fingers.

“Ahaha, you’d realized it?”

It was just that, Saki often watches an oversea’s drama series, where one of the actors has a fake eye. Her behavior and the way her body moves were almost identical to the actor’s so she tried saying it but it looked like it hit the bull-eye.

“One-eyed and one-legged. This is the reason for my being to be close to a god or an ayakashi. It is because I have this, that I’ll be fine.”

Iwanaga said it so that it would sweep away Saki’s worry, however, if she were to understand it normally it would make her even more worried that she should be.

What exactly had happened in this girl’s past?

What is it that made such young-looking girl from the outside to have the aura of someone who has vast experience?

Iwanaga gave her a smile which stopped her from asking any

further and then lowered her head.

“Well then, thank you very much for the coffee. If it is fine with you, I could send you the invitation card for my wedding with Kurou-senpai when the time comes.”

“Don’t need it.”

Iwanaga nodded looking satisfied hearing Saki’s flash reply and reached for her cane that she put at the entrance, and later, gone through the door.

For a little while, Saki, as if waiting for Iwanaga’s warmth and fragrance to disappear, did not move from her hips from the kitchen, and eventually got herself up and took the cup on the table away.

Steel Ghost Nanase is a ghost, a youkai and can be called a monster. It is not something that a police officer could lay a hand on.

“But I’ve decided not to run away.”

Even if she could not catch it, as someone who knows about the ghost, she should try to do something about it.

And if she were to add another reason, to run away exactly like the girl had told her had really irritated her.

She washed the cup thoroughly in the sink, put it in the dish drainer then went to turn on her computer.

First, she needs to find the right information. The information she had gazed earlier on was not even being confirmed of its authenticity.

What is the whole story that behind the Idol Nanase Karin’s death; that caused the Steel Ghost Nanase to be born in the first place?

During the time she was hiding in Makurazaka City to hide from being chased by the mass media, she died. And maybe if she was not being chased, she might still be alive.

Usually, when the mass media attacked an idol because of a rumor, it would be a rumor about a love affair. However, it was different in her case. As far as what Saki had read on the internet, her case was quite special.

Nanase Karin, or her real name Nanase Haruko, was suspected of killing her own father.

Idol Who Dies by Steel Beam

Yumihara Saki was eating chicken kara-age meal set alone at Makurazaka Police Station's cafeteria somewhere past the afternoon, the very next day after her encounter with Iwanaga Kotoko.

She decided to stop challenging herself to eat beef and fish for a while as she wanted to prioritize replenishing her stamina.

Thinking about how to deal with *Koujin Nanase* already made her head hurt.

She did not want to take the risk of making the gastric acid in her stomach to flow backward at the moment.

Her sleeping hours had also shortened, and every time she remembers that girl; Iwanaga Kotoko's face she slowly becomes angry by minutes.

Then, came Terada who leisurely put the tray of curry rice in his hands onto the table and sat opposite to her.

"Did you wait?"

"No."

Saki had sent an email to Terada about some matters that morning and told him the time of when will she take lunch.

She had a thought about the possibility that Terada could not come because of his work but about 5 minutes after she moved her chopsticks, the man with a solid body like an old days-refrigerator appeared right on time.

"Sorry. There was a lot of things I had to clean up. And I need to go out right after this too."

As he was saying that, he took a look at the meal set that Saki was

eating.

“Today is kara-age huh. So you’re fine with chicken meat?”

“Yes. Since I have no ties with bird-type youkai.”

Upon hearing Saki’s reply that he probably could not digest it that simple, his mouth moved a few times but then decided to pretend like he did not hear it.

“I’ll give you the things you asked somewhere in the evening. I couldn’t just go and borrow and then take out all the documents completely since it was a case outside of our jurisdiction.”

“Sorry for causing you so many troubles.”

“It’s fine, it also reassured me when Yumihara is willing to help.”

A clumsy smile appeared on Terada’s brutish face as he picked up the spoon.

As for Saki, she was feeling a little pain in the heart when being told as such.

For the time being, she did not plan to tell him about them. About how she was attacked by *Koujin Nanase* last night, and about a girl with a small build who came to this city in order to get rid of the *Koujin Nanase*.

“Enough of that, there was a report being filed yesterday too; about being attacked by *Koujin Nanase*.”

Terada began to talk while busying himself with his spoon and his curry rice, not exactly with a deliberately low voice, but just enough to be heard as if they were just chatting.

“Where was it?”

Since she was also being attacked by it yesterday, she did not find it as something that is heart-comforting to hear.

“Past 1 am, a drunk middle-aged man rushed to a police box in

Nishi-Makurazaka saying “a weird girl carrying a steel beam almost attacked me over there” as his face went pale. Of course, when the police officer who heard him went to the place where the man said he got attacked, there was no one there and told the man that he was just seeing things because he was drunk and made him go home. But since the man wasn’t really dead drunk and was walking just fine so that police officer was wondering if it was really okay to leave it like that and was a bit bothered by it.”

Nishi-Makurazaka is not under Saki’s station jurisdiction and is located about 20 km from there.

“Then, that officer recalled about the rumor that was spreading in the city recently, and after a few go-betweens, the info came to my place. I had checked the blogs and bulletin boards on the internet earlier and found out that, I don’t know if they were true, but there were 4 cases of people being attacked yesterday. Place and time were all scattered and not consistent. If all those were true, I don’t think it is a range that can be covered by only one people dressing up as *Koujin Nanase*.”

Because that Koujin Nanase *is* the real thing, and like a real ghost would do, it could appear anywhere no matter how far it is, regardless the distance and time, and then vanishes and reappears somewhere else.

Last night, Saki had seen *Koujin Nanase* vanished like that with her own eyes.

Terada who did not seem to be concerned with the change of Saki’s face color continued to move his spoon in a rhythm up and down.

“If this is not a work of a single person, then there’s a high possibility that it’s a crime syndicate. Witnesses are increasing with time, and there is even a website collecting entries or posts about *Koujin Nanase* and putting them together on a single site on the internet.”

Saki had also taken a look that website last night. Aggregating posts from multiple bulletin boards, listing links to blogs and web pages that talked about *Koujin Nanase*, collecting the never-ending

rumors; that site had organized everything to be in order.

One can also make a post on the site itself and then use that post to discuss, and that site became the number one site for topics like it on the internet.

If one looked at it from a different perspective, that site prevent the information scattered all over the virtual space of the internet from disappearing in a short time and it looked like it is putting them all together but actually it added another layer to the confusion that came with them, as if it was trying to grow them into something darker.

The site's name is also quite straightforward and is called《Koujin Nanase's All-In-One Site》.

"Although it's pretty convenient for someone looking for information, it also proved that Steel Ghost Nanase's existence had become stronger that people are making a website for it. A ghost's existence that is becoming more and more clear is never a good sign. Someone must've planned it so it developed into something like this."

"It might be."

The reason is not actually right but it indeed does not look like a good sign.

Saki while moving around the cabbage slices with her chopsticks, only throwing inappropriate responses as she recalled about the idol named Nanase Karin's personal history that she had looked into last night.

Idol Nanase Karin or her real name Nanase Haruko was not that well-known at that time.

Although her death had brought more attention to her name, still there are many people who do not know her.

Looking at the pictures uploaded onto the net, her face was indeed very cute and she was a lady-like curvaceous girl. It is understandable why she was famous among men.

Gravure pictures of her wearing a very dangerous swimsuit or something close to wearing nothing often appeared on the front page of magazines, and her photograph collections were selling quite well.

Even then, she was just one of the “above average” in that world, and they were plenty of other girls who were about the same place as her.

Her debut was in June when she was 17, still in high school at that time and she was scouted directly by a president of an entertainment production company.

She lived in the capital city, where there are a lot of people blessed with good look and appearance compared to the countryside, but even among those people she was a very standing out girl since middle school within the school district so her debut was not something surprising.

The president that scouted her at first said-

“That chest of yours would sell. Even if it didn’t, we can still do something about it.”

That president had approached her with such lines that showed no consideration to her as a high school girl.

And Nanase Haruko, although she faltered for a moment, said-

“You think only my chest would sell? You got a poor eye for judging thing.”

She gave such straight answer which made the president understood that she was not just a simple girl with a good look.

Upon that answer, that president insisted that it would sell better, and persuaded her even harder.

However, the competition in that world was really harsh. During the time of her debut, almost no one turned any attention to her and her popularity also was considered bad.

She got a nice style and was a beauty herself, and some of the critics about her are; she got a look of a very smart girl which gives an unpleasant feeling and she looks like a girl who cares about merit and demerit of everything.

The truth is, even if the episode of her life when she got scouted did not happen, her grades in her study were already among the top at her elite school. When she entered the entertainment world, it was said that the school was against it.

However, when she was brought to the principal office,

“Very well. I shall prove it to you then. I’m going to make sure I’ll be successful in both my study and entertainment career, and watch me bring greater fame for this school.”

she told those caustic words of an anecdote to them.

And added,

“Alright, which university do you wish me to enter so that you will approve?”

She asked such confidently, perhaps, that girl had made her resolution for it at that very moment.

However, her anecdote did not become a plus point to her. Instead, it became a minus point as they told her that it would probably be hard for someone with a cute look but bad personality.

Things that people generally seek from an idol do not mix well with her look, which are her intelligence and her actions.

Anyway, Nanase Karin was not popular during her debut.

However, one year after her debut, in July of her eighteenth, she managed to grab the chance.

She became a regular and appeared in a low-budget late-night drama “Youth! Fire Blowing Girl” and with that she won the popularity among a part of the audiences and her name began to raise greatly.

“The reasons for that drama to become popular, half of them were thanks to Nanase Karin.”

The director had earnestly said after they had finished the drama.

“I can’t believe we made such a diligent and brilliant girl play a stupid role like that. On top of that, she wasn’t that reluctant to show her chest.”

Nanase Karin played the role of “*Nanase Karin The Gravure Idol That Does Not Sell Well* ” as she is, which made it easier for people to remember her name.

She did well for a gravure idol in acting and her intelligent eye-look was appealed as her strong characteristic in the story and had earned herself quite a good evaluation as an actor.

Moreover, there is one thing that deeply tied Nanase Karin with the drama that became a topic; a song that she sang as a time-filling-in-song that was like a joke called “Blaze Radiator And Me” which she wrote the lyric and the song herself.

Normally, it was not a job that people would let a fresh gravure idol do, but they could only use a small number of people due to the low-budget which was the main reason for it.

When the director and the rest of the staff were in a discussion about what should they do about the song for the drama,

“We’ve come this far anyway, how about I made a song myself?”

Nanase Karin proposed it strongly to them.

It never hurts to try, and so when they let her try making it,

“Oh, it sounds nice even though in term of Japanese language the words are kinda strange, isn’t this a song with just tempo!”

“But, although it sounds silly, you really put a lot of thought into making it. This song resembles “Nanase Karin” quite well.”

“It strangely echoes in the ears. Sounds perfect to me.”

And thus, it was easily accepted.

Later, that song which the director had taken an interest in was used many times as the opening theme and also during the preview for the next episode. While on the internet, it became quite a hit on video-uploading sites.

Afterward, they made a CD out of it, made it available for mobile-phone download and the song became popular in karaoke that even people who did not watch the drama began to know Nanase Karin's name.

The director also said something like this after that.

"When I think about it now, all of them were within Nanase Karin's calculation for sure. The office nor the TV station never thought such song would sell so they didn't bother and all the rights for the song belong to Nanase Karin alone. But I think that the person herself, looking at changes in our time, must have seen it as something that would bring money."

That is right. The song was written completely by Nanase Karin herself. Hence, the royalty she got made her income increased greatly, and became very wealthy in a short moment.

It was said her income had amounted to something that is unbelievable for a gravure idol who just debuted one year ago.

For the record, the costume she was wearing when singing the song was the same costume she used in the drama and also used for the cover of the CD, but it also could be related to the ribbon and black red dress that *Koujin Nanase* is wearing.

It could be said that it is the costume that leaves the strongest impression about Nanase Karin's appearance.

Just like that, Nanase Karin appeared more often in TV and radio shows, and her quick brain and her quick-witted conversation skill were reevaluated.

Her photograph collections which were not selling were later being put also in bookstore's shelf due to the stable number of her fans.

Even the story of her university entrance examination had become a topic; she passed the entrance examination for a well-known national university which her school had asked her to in just one try.

Looking at her traces, people like Saki would probably think it as an unusual and rare successful story but even then she was just an idol who was popular only to a small number of people.

Perhaps even if she did not meet her end in Makurazaka City, Saki would still never happen to hear her name.

That was probably as far as someone “above average” could go.

Above average as it might be, for people at the bottom and the middle, she became their target of jealousy since she managed to break through them and stood above them.

As far as what could be analyzed from the internet, it marked the beginning of endless scandals and gossips for her that born from the jealousy of those people.

“Terada-san, have you ever considered the possibility of *Koujin Nanase* being an actual ghost?”

“Hmm, again with that story?”

“Yes, since looking at what I’d found when checking her personal history, it seems reasonable for her to turn into one.”

While recalling all the things she had looked up, she tried to touch on the topic obliquely to convince him about her real ghost theory.

Terada is a stubborn man but it is not like he never listens. If she could hit the right spot, he might come to accept that it is a real dead human’s spirit.

“*Idol Nanase Karin*, although I never knew about her until he was found dead around here, she was not a stupid and careless little girl for sure. I can tell that she was trying her best with her own power to not lose her own way, to keep reaching for the top. So I can understand why if some bad feelings remained when such girl died

somewhere in the middle."

Terada who already finished 8/10 of his curry in just a short moment deplored while looking at the curry plate as if it was not enough.

Saki then recalled some more about the things that happened up to the moment of Nanase Karin's death.

In June of her nineteenth right when Nanase Karin was rising as an idol, her father had passed away.

Falling down the stairs of his home apartment and hit his head, and the death was classified as an accident. At that time, there was nothing found that would topple the possibility of it was not an accident.

It was an unnatural death but no legally-ordered autopsy was done. Such thing is not that weird. If there was no suspicious element to treat it as a murder, it can the said that it was rather normal to not to spend extra cost and work of doing an autopsy.

Although there was news about the death of a partly-famous idol's father, no one made a huge fuss about it. Nanase Karin also appeared on TVs without any change.

"I'll keep doing my best for my late father."

She gave a mediocre comment about it, and that was all.

However, at the end of November of the same year, suddenly people began talking about their doubt about the death.

About when the daughter was successful in being an idol, the father tried to live off her daughter and quit his work which Nanase Karin felt it as unpleasant, and also maybe with insurance money as aim too, she murdered him while making it looked like an accident. That kind of story.

The story of her father was-

"Recently, Haruko seems to despise me now. She always boasted

about her smart brain since back then."

telling his friend his complaints about one month before his death rose to the surface and furthermore,

"I can feel Haruko's urge to kill me. By the time someone would be reading this, there's no doubt that I would've been killed by Haruko. No doubt about it."

Such content was written frankly by her father in his note which was found almost 5 months after the incident had happened.

The topic first started to spread on the internet, and later, as if trying to pursue the story, it was picked up by weekly magazines and sports papers.

Actively appearing idol doubted for murdering.

Since she was only suspected, the word "murderer" was not used directly in the open but it was enough to fill Nanase Karin's image with black color.

"She isn't that much different from us but because of luck, she's selling well."

Those people who were jealous of her said to be posting things on the internet with eagerness trying to add fuel to the flame of calumny.

That was around the middle of December and even after the year had changed, the topic continued to be discussed.

According to some rumors, as spring's released series or movies are likely to get popular, the scandals were planned by some influential production companies so that all Nanase Karin's casts for drama series and movies scheduled to be released in that spring would get rotated to new idols under them instead.

The production office where Nanase Karin's belong once planned to sue those weekly magazines and sports papers for libel, but fearing it would rather drag the matter on so they did not sue them in the end. All they could do was only to sit quietly and wait.

To add to the Nanase Karin's problem of things did not go well with her father,

"Nanase has a sister who is 2 years old above her, and she doesn't get along well with that sister of hers too."

which is, in fact, the truth and,

"Someone said the reason was because her mother died a few days after giving birth to Nanase Karin."

it was being spread around added a fabricated fact like a complex household problem.

Just like that Nanase Karin took a break from her work and

"I'll be back soon enough, you fools."

left an abandonment-ish short comment on her production's company's homepage and afterward, she began to hide herself and move around from hotel to hotel in various direction, spending her days while being hounded by the mass media.

Then, around the end of January, as if fate has nothing to do with it, she lodged at a hotel in Makurazaka City. Without knowing her fate that she would die next to it in just a few days.

Saki while looking up for the flow of events up till her death on the net, tried her best to only pick resources with high authenticity and later make a summary out of them but idol itself always has a false side to begin with.

The reason for her selling well and also the reason for her being chased were all coming from rumors and public opinions.

Seeking for the truth behind it, from the beginning is perhaps impossible.

After eating up the remaining curry rice, Terada extended his hand towards the cup filled with water.

"In the end, the suspicion of her killing her own father is still

unsolved, and neither any of those people who were stirring up things on the internet nor those weekly magazines and newspaper are going to take any responsibility for what they did. As for Nanase Karin herself, it wasn't just luck alone, I'm sure she worked hard in selling her name too. If she became a revengeful spirit and started attacking people, or rather the society, I do understand the reason."

"I thought a detective would not believe in a ghost-like story, but I want to believe that it's not entirely true."

Although it was meal time, it does not mean saying things as if there is something stuck between her teeth is alright.

(T/N: There is a wordplay here. The author is using the idiom lit." saying things as if there is something stuck between one's teeth" which means to say something indirectly or in a roundabout way. And they were currently eating. Get it?)

And it did make Saki a bit gloomy.

Even then, Terada did not make an annoyed face nor try to change the subject but instead gave a response while looking straight in her face.

"It's not like I'm completely denying things like ghost. In fact, I even make sure to go visiting grave every year because I believe in spirit's existence. Even in this case, if Nanase Karin's ghost had appeared at her death scene with blood flowing from her crushed face floating around there doing nothing, I'd believe it. But *Koujin Nanase* is different, no?"

For a while, as if trying to sort the right words, he was swaying the spoon in the air and later hit his plate once with it before speaking the words he had arranged.

"She is, right, feels like something that people made. Wearing a mini-skirt dress, having a crushed face, holding steel beam and swinging it around; all these have become the things that would make those people, the society which had driven her to her death to be irresponsibly delighted. Isn't it weird that a girl holding a grudge on the society that she'd become a ghost, would look like

that? Then, there must be something, completely different from Nanase Karin's will that is hiding behind or at the bottom of this."

Saki was shocked.

I see, that does make sense, she thought.

If one were to say that Nanase Karin is a revengeful ghost, then the fact that it is weird for it to go 'appealing' itself to the public too much would refute it, and it contradicts with the fact *Koujin Nanase* is a spiritual existence without denying the existence of spirit.

If they were debating, this is where the judge would declare Terada's win.

However, the reality is unconventional compared to logic, and Koujin Nanase *is* a spiritual existence.

Nonetheless, after her point had splendidly been broken by him, now, trying to convince Terada is close to impossible.

"Yumihara, by any chance, the boyfriend that you had broken up with, did he die and later showed up as a ghost? And then came to apologize for his bad behavior of the past or something like that?"

Terada seemed to be still concerned about their conversation yesterday. He was probably trying to do it prudently, not to tactlessly deny the existence of ghost to someone who had such experience.

It was an unfitting sensitiveness for someone with broad shoulder and huge size.

"No, he isn't dead, nor that he had become a ghost."

Kurou would not die that very easy as he, for one, is a man who had eaten mermaid flesh.

From ancient times, it was told that anyone who eats mermaid's flesh will become ageless and immortal.

Eating the flesh of a mermaid and become immortal and lived for

several hundred years. Such folklores like *YaoBikuni*, *ChitoseBikuni* are very famous in Japan since long ago.

(*T/N: The author provided how to read YaoBikuni* (八百比丘尼) *but did not do so with ChitoseBikuni* (千年比丘尼)*, which I found strange and it turned out I could not find its pronunciation anywhere on the net, so I kinda made it up, but "chitose" is how you read the* (千年) *part. Link to the wiki here.*)

It is not known why but in western countries there is no myth about immortality from eating mermaid's flesh, perhaps it is because eating fish raw is rare in their culture. Among the mermaid-eating legends in Japan, most of them were eaten raw.

Saki who was going out with Kurou since high school knows that Kurou was growing up along with years so he is not ageless.

That too, according to Kurou, is probably because of the Kudan's meat that he had eaten along which negates some of the effects.

However he might stop aging when he reached a certain age, he also said that in a lonely tone.

"He just got himself a new girlfriend, and is doing well and happy. Even if he became a ghost, I'm sure he won't be visiting my place."

Her tone became somewhat enraged before she could notice it, and her chest was filled with anger.

At least, if it was a girl similar to her, maybe she would not be this irritated.

"Sorry, I said unnecessary things."

Seeing Saki's face as if she would probably snap the chopsticks between her fingers into two, Terada readjusted his sitting posture out of feeling at lost in the situation.

"Me too, for getting emotional."

What was she thinking, making someone who is a high-rank judo holder to sit straight and apologize to her. Saki put down her

chopsticks and lowered her head.

“Terada-san, how many other police officers that are feeling uneasy about the *Koujin Nanase*? It seems like all the happenings in the city got into your ears pretty quick.”

“There are only a few people that are actually moving around for it. As for those who are feeling suspicious about this, I think there is more than one person in each jurisdiction. Sometimes there are a few of them that when they have this kind of uneasy feeling as if something is about to happen, they would go and act on their own alone. I took care a few cases like that so I guess I’m quite well-known to them, and when things like this happen, they would inform me first.”

This is likely the result of his achievements after working for a long time in the field which could not be represented by words or ranks.

“That is also why they are willing to lend me the investigation papers on Nanase Karin’s death. I did help them a few times after all. If a group of criminals is planning to do something in this city and they don’t actually care who it is as long it can be a ghost, then there is no need to look into it. However we also have to think about the possibility that it wasn’t an accidental death but a homicide and these recent happenings were caused by it.”

Terada emptied the water inside the cup before and putting it onto the tray and rose from his seat.

“So, I’ll send you the materials later in the evening. It’d be a great help if you could read through them in my place and tell me the summary later. I am, after all, the type that does work by walking around rather than sitting at a desk.”

“Okay, if it’s only that much I won’t mind at all.”

An excellent detective would not only quick on his feet but also proficient at doing deskwork so it must be him being modest.

Terada laughed with a big smile at Saki’s reply and was going to leave the table and go back to his duty but he suddenly stopped his

step and dropped these words.

“Yumihara, I know a good place for *Yakitori*. Maybe we could go there later?”

Up to now, he appeared to be calm and unconcerned about their surrounding but when it came to personal topic like this, he changed his tone into a formal. Maybe he was trying to look refined or he was just clumsy and awkward.

Saki could not help but laugh.

Terada who could not understand the meaning behind Saki’s reaction pursed his lips looking somewhat uneasy.

Saki held back her laugh and did a small bow before giving her reply.

“It sounds good, I’d be glad to go. I also wanna talk more about *Koujin Nanase* too.”

Her reply was implying him to invite her not ‘someday’ but while they can still talk about Koujin Nanase, in the near future.

The person asking who did not expect an answer close to that one, for a short while, although he looks like a bald-headed monster seemed very happy like a dove who was given bread crumbs before saying-

“Alright then, keep your schedule open for the day after tomorrow’s night.”

and walked away to return his tray of plate and cup while nodding happily.

Saki let out a sigh wondering if she made the wrong choice but when she saw the lunch set that was not even half finished, the thought of how she should shake herself free from her past already had occupied her mind.

Even Kurou is now dating a different type of girl.

Then she thought that the idea of stop being nitpicky and try something new is not a bad option.

She should make use of this *Koujin Nanase* case as a reason to start anew.

And later that evening, when he returned to the station after finished dealing with a rear-end collision case at the national highway she found the papers on Nanase Karin's case on her desk.

There was also a very short email saying it had arrived on her phone.

What to do now.

Iwanaga Kotoko began to ponder in front of her computer display as she was fiddling with the curling kitten on her walking cane's handle with her thumb.

Almost one hour had passed since she entered the net cafe just behind the hotel she had lodged yesterday.

The time was almost 7 o'clock in the evening.

Since it was just early September the sky was not completely dark yet but it was getting closer to the time for those non-human beings to start appearing.

The shop assistant in the net cafe was beginning to glance repeatedly at Iwanaga over time, and it was likely because he was thinking that Iwanaga is under-aged.

Although she was not yet 20, she was also not at the age where her night activity is restricted.

She had her student identity card with her so proving her age would be easy but to be interrupted while she is thinking is not a pleasant matter.

Even before this, whenever Iwanaga had to go somewhere far for her youkai and monster business she had a hard time getting a hotel to stay and conducting her guiding for the youkai matter.

After she started going out with Kurou, even though his mouth would not stop complaining he would still give her a hand in solving the troubles for the ayakashi so she no longer had to worry about such troubles.

However, Kurou is not with her this time.

Even more, she really did not expect to see Yumihara Saki. It was completely out of her calculation.

She had heard that Saki is working at a police station somewhere before but she did not imagine that she would be connected to her in this way.

Even if a connection is born between the two of them, it would be better if she was living a happy life and doing fine on her own but when she saw that person's room and its atmosphere with her own eyes, she could tell that Saki has not found a new love and still has not completely cut her ties with Kurou yet.

What troubled her even more was the fact that Saki had this air around her, the kind of air that would attract Kurou's attention. Kurou always attracted to a girl who is in pain and looking unstable.

The old Saki looked tall and slim, with a perfect weight. And she also looked so strong like nothing could sway her conviction. But the current Saki looked pretty thin and she seemed afraid.

As for the reason, it is probably because of Kurou.

That was why no matter what would happen, Iwanaga do not want Kurou to see the current Saki.

And the main problem right now, *Koujin Nanase* was nevertheless a huge pain too.

The ayakashi had come consulted her two days ago and from their

story, she could conjecture roughly what was happening and most of them hit the mark.

Normally, be it a youkai or a ghost, be it smart or not, it is always possible to communicate with them.

Even if they do not have a mouth or even a whole face, it is still possible to understand each other and to know their wish.

Yet, when *it* should belong to the same kind like them, it does not feel like *it* was listening or even reacted to Iwanaga's voice. *It* just appeared, moved and swung the steel beam around as if *it* does not have a mind or a will of its own.

It is a spirit of the dead for sure, but *it* does not have any desire.

As far as Iwanaga could see, it does not appear to be using power from sources like grudge, hatred or something wicked, to unnaturally keep its own existence.

Its act indeed looked like it is anti-society and rampaging around showing its resentment, but at the same time, it felt like it is just a hollow puppet.

If it was a normal monster, it is possible to defeat it with just strength. Negotiation and conversation are also possible options.

There is no need to think hard about which way to pick to do it.

Even though a monster is a monster, it still something that clings to life and there is more than enough way existed to sever such thing.

One should not get this wrong. Even though they are called monsters, since the ancient time there is almost no one among them that strong enough and could bizarrely kill humans as they like.

They are a being that could be defeated once humans know to do it. For that very reason, they fear and do not wish to attract human's attention more that they have to.

They only cause harm to humans to benefit from it in order to strengthen their existence and they would stop before humans are

seriously going to take measures to get rid of them.